


KINGDOMS CURIOUS



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He pulled over the little wooden dresser

KINGDOMS CURIOUS

BY

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With Illustrations by ARTHUR RACKHAM, H. R. MILLAR, and others



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BIG TOWN & LITTLE TOWN

WHERE have you been all day long?" asked Martha, the baker's wife, as she saw her husband wearily enter their little house and sit down. His clothes and his boots were so thickly covered with dust that it was easy to guess he had walked many miles since leaving his home. "But it is indeed waste of breath for me to ask such a question, for so frequently have I received the same reply from you that I can answer my own enquiry well enough. Staring in through the gates of Big Town, wishing and wondering what you would do had you been born as large as the giants who live there.

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Why can't you be content here ? You are small yourself, you have a small wife, and smaller children. What is there to grumble at ? I sincerely wish with all my heart that you were one of them, then perhaps you would be too sensible to fill your head with such nonsense."

Hans, the baker, knew it was wiser not to argue with his wife, so before she finished speaking he got up and went out to his bakery, and there set to work to make his loaves. But though his hands were busy, his thoughts were far away at Pimpeldorf, the Big Town, while his great desire was to leave the Little Town, as Ninckelburg was called, and dwell among these large people. For in Pimpeldorf there lived a race of giants. Great tall men and women, twelve feet high, used to walk along the wide streets and pass in and out of their houses, which were built on a large scale, so as to suit these tremendous people and their children ; but how different it was at Ninckelburg, for though the towns were only separated by a distance of fifteen miles, you could have easily imagined yourself to be in another part of the world, so unlike were they. In Little Town everybody was small. The people who inhabited it never grew taller than three feet ; they lived in tiny houses, with wee children who had tiny appetites and wore very small clothes. Certain things were the same in either place, such as the love the inhabitants had for each other, and their tenderness to those who were ill or in trouble, their

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wish to be prosperous and to succeed in their various undertakings ; but in spite of the fact that the poverty which existed in Big Town was far more severe than that in Little Town, the hearts of the small people—Hans in particular—were full of envy for the giants, because of their size.

Hans himself was a prosperous baker, and his loaves of bread were eaten in nearly all the little houses in the town ; he had a good wife who dressed the children neatly and kept his home the perfection of tidiness, and did her utmost to make everybody happy around her. But the last few years all her efforts had been useless, for the baker seemed only to be interested in one thing, and that was the doings of those who dwelt in Big Town. Time after time he would leave his shop long before his work was complete, and trudge over to the distant town just to peer through the gates at the giants, who, if they noticed him at all, would smile kindly down upon him under the impression he was the baby son of the gatekeeper. At first Hans used to invent an excuse for these long journeyings, for he knew it must look very strange when he hurried away almost daily and never returned until his wife and children were all fast asleep ; but soon he gave up the deceit, and started off quite early in the morning, heedless of the reproaches of his wife or the entreaties of his little ones to remain with them. He generally used to carry with him a basket of bread in the hope of being able to sell some

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as he went along the road, but, after a time, as his visits became more frequent, his courage naturally became greater, so that one day he determined to be very brave and venture within the gate of Big Town. But there, alas! a sad thing happened, for as this tiny little man went along the streets, he was so impressed with the size of the houses on either side of him that as he gazed up he walked unheedingly on to the doorstep of one of them, and upset all his loaves upon the stones. Before he had time to collect his bread again, the front door opened, and a giant came out. The great man was evidently going for a walk, for he had a hat upon his head and in one hand he carried an umbrella and a pair of kid gloves, each finger of which was bigger than Hans' thickest stockings. When he saw the baker he stopped short, and looked at him with an angry frown.

"Now, my little fellow," he said, "you must not play outside my door, you know, so run off like a good boy, and don't spill any more of these crumbs about. I never saw such a mess," he went on, pointing to Hans' loaves of bread. "It looks like a nursery with those untidy crumbs all over the place. Don't do it again, my little lad."

"Little lad, indeed!" exclaimed Hans, furiously. "Little lad, indeed!"

But the giant had not waited to argue. Directly he had finished speaking he went on for his walk, and

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before the baker's indignation had cooled he was half-way down the street. Slowly and sorrowfully Hans collected the despised loaves, and then, with a deep sigh, he started to return to Little Town ; but his heart was so heavy that he dawdled along until it was dark before he reached the outskirts of the wood which separated the two towns. In spite of the time that had passed he could not think of the words the giant had used without burning with anger. It humiliated him deeply to remember he had been addressed as a "little fellow" and a "good boy," and his desire to be taller became stronger than ever. "If only I could be as one of the giants and live in Big Town!" he exclaimed with a bitter laugh, and then he held his breath in terror, for he fancied he heard an echo to his mirth coming from the interior of the wood. Yes, there it was again—the strange squeal which had so startled him! What could it be? Hans stood listening intently, for the sound was one of pain. Of that he was sure ; so, forgetful alike of the darkness of the wood and the many stories of the weird things it contained at night, he plunged into a path that led to the densest part of the thicket, and only paused from time to time to wait for a repetition of the noise to guide him. For the baker was a good man, with a tender heart towards all who suffered, and the cry that had attracted him he was certain came from some wounded animal. Some poor creature held captive in a trap, he guessed ; and as he thought of its

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terror while it struggled to free itself, he was more determined than ever to find it and give it its release, for, like all who have kind hearts, Hans could not bear to neglect an animal, particularly when it was in distress. He imagined it fighting to escape all the night, and then he pictured it lying cold and still as the dawn came, and the distress of its companions when it was missed ; and as each fresh idea entered the little man's head he hurried forward, until, guided by the cry, he came upon a small mole lying helpless and exhausted in the cruel clutches of a steel trap. The small creature was powerless to move, for it was gripped fast by the leg, and when the baker skilfully released it, he was afraid he was too late, and that the poor mole was going to die. Quite motionless it lay on the moss, and except for its weak gasps it did not appear able to move. But as Hans carefully destroyed the trap, it seemed to him that the mole had ceased to whimper and was trying to speak, so he knelt at the animal's side, and put his head down so as to hear more clearly. Yes, the mole was certainly talking, and what was more, it was undoubtedly talking to him, and, at last, Hans caught the words :

“ Follow me ! Follow me ! ”

With great difficulty the little animal commenced to crawl away, but the trap had bruised its poor leg so severely that it could hardly use it, therefore it limped slowly and painfully along while Hans followed close

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behind. Deep down into the heart of the wood went the strange pair, and though the baker was very much surprised he showed no mistrust, for he was certain his new friend would not allow him to come to any harm. Suddenly, as Hans peered into the darkness around him, he was startled to see tiny lights flickering about. Those on the ground he recognised as being glow-worms, while the others, from the manner in which they disappeared for an instant and then shone forth in another place, he guessed to be Will-o'-the-Wisps ; but while he was busily watching this, his guide stopped so quickly that Hans nearly trod on him.

"Remain here," said the Mole, who still sounded much exhausted ; "I have to attend the Fairies' Parliament, to which no mortals may venture. Rest by this tree, and I will join you shortly, but my presence is needed among yonder friends, for they require my vote."

"The Fairies' Parliament !" echoed the baker in great surprise. "I did not know such a thing existed."

"Oh," replied the Mole, rather sharply, "then who do you think manages the wood and everything that lives in it ? You mortals do such a lot of damage that our work is never ending ; but I must not waste my time chatting to you. Remember, you have to wait for me, and while you wait, try not to destroy the trees : do not even cut your name upon their trunks ;

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it hurts them so deeply, and makes them feel most ashamed. I can't understand why human beings do it. It is not pretty, and it is certainly not useful."

When Hans' eyes were accustomed to the gloom of the place, he was able to look around him and note the strange sights he saw. Gathered together in groups were all the animals that lived in the wood, even the birds were privileged to attend. A stag, with a superb pair of antlers, moved from one to another with an air of great dignity, while by his side stepped a dainty deer, lifting her feet most gently lest she should tread upon some of the smaller creatures that crowded round. There were several foxes present, and they seemed great talkers, for they were surrounded by admiring rabbits, badgers, and others, who listened to every word spoken with great interest. Other animals were there, too; but Hans had not time to notice everything before six wood-mice, at a given sign, rushed towards some sprays of lilies of the valley, and by agitating their stalks caused the white flowers to chime a sweet peal of bells. And then the tumult ceased, and each creature hurried to its place in the Parliament. The stag and the deer went to the throne, while the others clustered round; but while Hans looked he was surprised to see a change coming over each creature, for they were enveloped in a peculiar sort of golden mist which melted away in a few seconds, leaving in the place of the animal a dainty



The fairies crowded round to see what he was like.

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little fairy. The King and Queen of the fairies, as the stag and the deer proved to be, were so lovely that Hans was almost afraid he was dreaming; but he soon realised this was not the case, when a tiny little fairy tripped forward to the throne, and began to speak earnestly. There was a slight limp in the walk of the wee person which seemed familiar to the watching baker, and when he observed one of its little legs was disfigured by an ugly black bruise, he knew it was his friend, the Mole, and he listened with great attention.

The King and Queen seemed horrified at the story, and when the fairy began to describe the cruel trap the Queen covered her ears with her hands; but she looked happier as she heard of the kind assistance the little man had given, and what seemed to please her Majesty so much was the fact that the baker gave his help willingly and unasked.

"I should like to see this brave mortal," she said, when the narrative was finished. "Such loving care must not pass without reward or thanks. A kindness done to one of the animals who dwell in the wood is a kindness done to the fairies."

So Hans was led forward, while the fairies crowded round the new arrival to see what he was like. The Queen gazed at him, too, and there were such sweet tears of gratitude in her eyes that Hans wished she would continue to stare at him, for she had the prettiest face he had ever seen.

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But when she had looked a long while, she spoke, and her words rang in the baker's ears for many a long day.

"I have heard, O mortal," she said, "of the kindness you showed to one of my fairies while she was wearing her disguise of a mole. She has told me of the readiness with which you answered her cries for help, the haste you made to search for her, the compassion you displayed when you found her in the cruel grip of the trap. I can imagine for myself the gentleness with which you released her, and I am glad it lies in our power to repay you. In the heart of each mortal, I have always been told, lies one desire which is dearer to him than all others, so I send for you, Hans, to bid you speak and tell me in what way I can serve you. Think carefully, therefore, and let me know what you wish."

For a few seconds Hans felt so abashed he could not speak. He did not consider he had done anything to deserve reward, for he did not know the world contained people selfish enough not to assist any animal in pain, and as his eye wandered restlessly about, while his busy brain tried to frame an excuse, his gaze fell on a tall pine-tree standing near him, and again he was conscious of his lack of inches.

"Speak, Hans," said the Queen, after patiently waiting to hear his request; "surely there is something I can grant you, little man?"

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Little man ! The baker scowled as he heard the expression, and then, with sudden determination, he spoke out his wish.

“Oh, make me like those who live in Pimpeldorf, the Big Town,” he pleaded. “Give me height.”

Directly Hans had spoken a strange silence fell upon the Fairies’ Parliament, and, what was very trying, the flickering lights instantly went out and the baker was left in absolute darkness. The leaves of the trees seemed to mock at him as they rustled, one to another.

While the little man stood waiting, a bat flew swiftly past his face.

“Go home,” it screamed, as he started back in fear. “Go home ! Don’t waste your time here, it is very late.”

And for the second time that evening Hans felt beside himself with indignation. As he made his way out of the wood and on to the road, he almost succeeded in persuading himself it was a dream after all, for there was no trace of the Fairies’ Parliament, in which he had been a central figure. As he gazed up and down he sighed heavily, for he realised he was wide awake and had a long distance to walk home. So often had he trudged along the road, he knew every inch of the way, and as he lighted his pipe he began to walk quickly, so as to be back as much before dawn as possible ; but he had evidently made a mistake in his

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calculations, for he found himself in Little Town long before he had finished his first pipe, while, as a rule, he smoked three or four on his homeward way.

"Maybe," he told himself, "I stepped out sharply, and yet I do not think that can be so, as I am not hot. However, I am glad to be home again, and as to-night is evidently going to be one of my lucky nights, let us hope my good fortune will continue and I shall find my wife fast asleep when I go upstairs to bed."

All the people who lived in Little Town were so honest that it was not considered necessary to lock up the door at night, therefore Hans had simply to raise the latch and walk in ; but as he prepared to do so, he received a violent blow on the chest which made him start away from the door and lean against the wall in a most dazed condition. "What can it be?" he asked himself, as he tried to collect his scattered thoughts. "It cannot be robbers, for there are none, and indeed I have nothing of value in my little cottage ; but somebody gave me a very hard knock, as the bruise on my chest will testify in the morning."

But directly he raised his foot to cross the threshold the same thing was repeated, only this time his face also struck against something hard. Without moving away, he lifted his hand to feel what was before him, and then, to his amazement, he found he was pressing against the flower-boxes at the first-floor windows of

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the little house, while only his feet were able to get in at the door.

“I have commenced to grow,” he told himself in great delight ; then a sudden idea came to him, which made him carefully back away from the bedroom that was just opposite his eyes. “But what a tiresome hour to grow in !” he said with a grumble ; “it will be difficult to make dear Martha believe it, especially as I seem to have stopped now. The sunshine would have helped her to get used to a bigger husband ; as it is, I am sure she will be frightened and scream. But it is very nice to be tall at last. Already I feel far more important ; and how surprised my neighbours will be in the morning when they discover what a fine fellow I have become ! And how much richer I shall be, for I shall be able to do several little odd jobs, for which, hitherto, I have been obliged to pay a man ! It will be so simple now for me to repair the roof, or to gather the fruit even from the top boughs of the apple trees. Well, well, how happy I feel to be sure ! but as I am very tired I think I will go to bed and leave it until the morning before I tell Martha my good news.”

Going to bed, however, was a very serious matter, as Hans found directly he entered his little cottage. Before he got inside at all he had nearly to double himself up, and he was a long time sitting on the door-mat before he discovered which was the best method of getting upstairs. It was impossible to walk to bed

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as he had been accustomed to do, because when he stood upright the top of his head pressed against the ceiling, which was painful to him and very bad for the ceiling, which had been recently whitewashed. "I cannot wriggle up on my knees," he said to himself as he gazed up at the steep little stairs. "It is not good for my clothes, and if anybody happened to hear of it, I should be the laughing-stock of the place. I will go up on my hands and feet, just as if I was playing at big bear with the children."

After a long struggle Hans arrived at his bedroom door, and, still on all-fours, he crept into the room and began to undress and get ready for bed. Fortunately, Martha worked so hard all day that she slept very soundly during the night, or I do not know what she would have said had she opened her eyes in time to see her husband crawling about on the carpet like an immense fly. But soon, however, he was in bed, though it was a long time before he was able to get to sleep, he had so much to think about. He hardly believed what had happened, and he was still afraid he would wake to find it all a dream, and that he was not changed from the same tiny little man who had to work so bravely in his bakery to support his wife and children ; but at last he was so tired his eyes closed and he went fast asleep, though very soon he woke up to find his wife shaking him vigorously.

"Hans! Hans!" she whispered in his ear. "Oh,

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do wake up. I am sure there are thieves in the house, for I can hear them moving about the room. Listen ! they are smashing all the furniture."

There certainly was an extraordinary noise going on, just as if something was being broken up into little pieces, but as the baker listened he grew hot all over with horror, for he knew what had disturbed his wife was the fact that he had suddenly begun to grow again, and his legs, in their eagerness to stretch themselves out to their full length, had kicked off the end of the bed. Directly he felt the cold air blowing on to his toes, he knew the woodwork had given way and that his feet were dangling over the end of the mattress ; but though it was most uncomfortable, he decided to say nothing, but, when his wife was asleep again, creep out of bed and put a chair for his feet to rest on. It was a long while, however, before Martha became calm, for she was convinced everything they had was going to be stolen, and she could not help thinking, far away in her heart, that her husband was rather a coward not to go down and search the house as she begged. But soon she left off grumbling, much to the relief of poor Hans, for his feet had become so cold he was afraid they would never be warm again, and even when he put on his stockings and arranged the chair to his liking he did not settle down at once.

It was Martha's habit to rise very early, for the morning was the busiest time of the day, and she had

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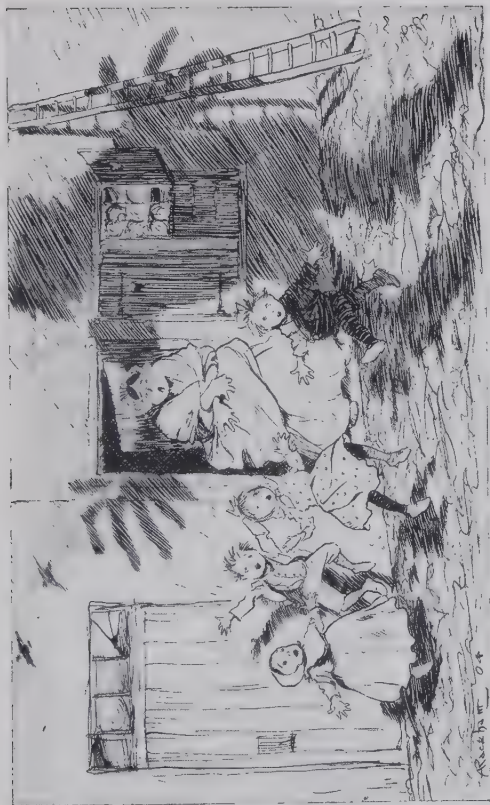
the children to wash and dress and prepare for school, and all the breakfast to cook before she began the housework ; so while her husband slept, it was her custom to get up, dress herself, and go downstairs and begin her labour. It was almost dark when she arose, but just as she walked to the door, to her annoyance she stumbled over a chair placed at the foot of the bed.

“How careless of Hans !” she exclaimed as she picked herself up again. “The idea of having a chair there when he knows perfectly well its proper place is against the wall” ; but as she jerked it away from the bed she was startled by something dropping on to the floor. “Why, Hans, not content with leaving a chair lying about, must needs pile it up with his shoes and stockings—nasty muddy shoes indeed ! They ought to be in the out-house downstairs. I will push them before me as they are too dirty to touch.” And so saying, she gave the shoes a sharp kick, hoping they would go towards the door. To her astonishment, the baker gave a shriek. “Oh, oh !” he cried, “don’t kick me like that. What an unkind thing to do !”

“Kick you ?” echoed his astonished wife. “I never touched you—only your muddy shoes.”

“Yes, but I am in the shoes,” he explained. “My legs were resting on the chair when you pulled it away. I do wish you would not interfere so.”

“Hans,” said his wife, sternly, “what nonsense is



They began to dance and clap their hands.

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this that you are talking? I am glad none of the children are near to hear such terrible falsehoods. What do you mean?"

"I mean," replied the poor man, feeling the time had arrived for him to speak the truth—"I mean I have grown, and the bed is not nearly long enough for me. It is quite simple, surely."

But Martha had not waited to hear any more. With her hands over her ears she hurried downstairs, for, like most of the people who had been born and brought up in Little Town, she found no amusement in things which were not true, and she felt if she remained to listen to her husband's nonsense, the bread would burn in the oven, or one of the children fall into the rain-tub as a punishment to her.

Her heart was full of anger as she set about her duties, and each child was glad to be released from her hand, for being cross she tugged their hair with the comb and did not mind at all when the soap went in their eyes. But they soon escaped into the garden and played about while Martha fetched her broom and began to sweep, and she swept and swept and swept until her anger died down and she almost laughed at what she believed to be her husband's little joke. Suddenly, however, a loud shriek startled her, and then another and another, and the three children tore into the house and hid their faces in their mother's apron. "Oh, mother," they sobbed, "we have seen a giant—

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a great, big, strange giant, and he is in our garden. Oh ! Oh ! Oh !”

“Nonsense, children,” replied their mother, wondering why the entire family seemed determined to tell falsehoods that day. “The giants never leave Big Town. It must be the shadow of the tall tree at the end of the path.”

“No ; we saw him. We know it’s true,” insisted the children. “And he came out of your bedroom window, so he must be real. We were digging potatoes when a great foot suddenly came nearly on the top of us, then another stepped down beside it, and as we ran in, all the body had wriggled out and the head was beginning to come too. We saw the tip of his chin, and he looked so funny.”

At the mention of her bedroom window Martha flushed a deep red, which showed clearly how angry she was ; already she suspected this was some trick of her husband’s to frighten the children, though why he should wish to do so she could not understand. As she walked to the back-door her trembling little ones tried to hold her back.

“Don’t go out, Mother dear. Oh, don’t go out. We are sure he will tread on us with his large feet, and we so wanted to live until we were quite grown up.” But suddenly they gave a loud yell of delight and began to dance and clap their hands. “Why, it’s Father—only Father, after all !” was the cry. “But what

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has made you so large and funny-looking, Father dear?"

Martha could hardly believe the strange story her husband had to tell; but whether she believed it or not, there she was with a great big husband instead of the small one she had always been accustomed to see about the place. At first she was delighted, and ran all over Little Town to give the news to her friends and beg them to come to see for themselves what wonderful things had happened. But, like all successes, it had its disadvantages. When Martha wanted to talk to her husband, unless she did not mind shouting her remark so that everybody could hear, she was obliged to stand on the kitchen table, for since he had grown so much her head was hardly tall enough to reach to his knees. It was impossible, therefore, that they could walk together, for besides attracting the attention of all the inhabitants of Little Town, she found it most difficult to keep pace with him. Although Hans would walk so slowly that, to himself, he barely moved, poor Martha was obliged to run as fast as she could to prevent getting left behind on the road, and that meant, of course, that either she was very late for supper or the baker had to sit and patiently wait for her return home exhausted with her run and very annoyed at the length of his legs. He was not able to work so hard either, because he could not get into the little bake-house which he was accustomed to use, and when he

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tried to knead the dough out in the garden, that proved to be useless, for his large hands could not fit into the trough the dough was mixed in. But in spite of these drawbacks Martha was very proud of her enormous husband, and the fact that he was unable to work made him, in her eyes, quite a superior person. She was strong and willing, so she encouraged Hans to be idle, and gladly did his share of the day's duties, so that he could sit in the centre of the market-place to be admired by all who passed. Hans was now so conceited that this quite suited him; but in time, however, Martha's daily labours exhausted her so much that she became cross and envious of the lazy manner in which her husband lived, and she, too, craved to be tall, and once more the size of the baker. "It is not fair," she declared indignantly, "that he should have all the adoration while she should be ignored or despised because she had not been able to grow too. She would be just as fine a person as he was if she had had the same chance given to her, and how much better they would be as two giants! One was always so odd and lonely, and really in need of a companion."

So after much discussion it was arranged that Martha should set off one day directly dinner was over and walk along the road to the place Hans had described, while her husband would follow, having given her a good start, so as to enable them to reach the spot where they turned off to the wood at about the same moment,



Martha was obliged to run as fast as she could.

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for Martha, like many a woman before her, hated to be kept waiting. Hans was quite glad his wife desired to be made tall too, for having received all the admiration possible for one giant to receive in Little Town, he had begun to imagine he was too fine a person to waste his time talking to little people all day long, and he hated to hear his friends remark upon him when he passed them in the street. Everybody said the same thing when they saw him coming, and though he was still intensely proud of himself he was so bored with his surroundings that he was glad to think he was to have a companion to share his glory.

When they plunged into the wood together it seemed an easy task to reach the spot where the Fairies' Parliament was held, but after walking for some time Hans was forced to confess he did not know the way.

"If only I could find the Mole again!" he exclaimed in despair, as they arrived at a place where three paths went in different directions; "then I should have a sure guide at once. But hush! I hear the leaves rustle in the undergrowth. Perhaps he is coming to our aid—yes, here he is, going to Parliament, I am sure. See how serious he looks. Let us follow him quietly, but do not speak to disturb him."

The Mole never once glanced over his back to see who was following him, but bustled straight forward until Hans saw the lights flickering just as he did

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before, and then he knew he had reached the end of his journey.

"Let us stop here," he whispered to his wife, "until all the animals put off their shapes and become fairies for the time being. We must wait until the King and Queen appear, and then I will advance and beg this favour of them."

Martha had never imagined anything so wonderful in all her life as the beautiful animals that changed into fairies while she watched, and when she saw her husband walk towards them she rushed after him in case his big feet should do any damage, and thus she found herself standing before the throne on which were seated the King and Queen. His Majesty looked at Hans and his wife as they bowed low before him, and then he waved them away with great dignity.

"The Parliament has much important business to discuss to-night," he said haughtily ; "and I request, therefore, that if there are any strangers present they will take this opportunity of withdrawing."

But Hans had walked a long way, and was determined to speak and see if it was possible to get what he wanted.

"Your Majesty," he replied humbly, "I entreat you not to send me away without, at least, allowing me to speak, for I and my wife have come a great distance to ask your help. You were very good to me a little while ago, but perhaps you do so many kindnesses that



His Majesty looked at Hans.

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you have already forgotten this one. I am Hans the Baker. I used to be called Little Hans ; but you, as a reward for a very unimportant service I was able to show to a member of your Parliament, were good enough to change me until I became as tall as all the men who live in Big Town. I am proud of my height now, and quite satisfied ; yet, nevertheless, I come to beg you to grant me still another favour."

"Another favour !" echoed the King in great surprise. "Is there no end to mortal greed ? I granted you what you declared to be the dearest wish in your heart. You must not change your mind like this, but learn to be content."

"But it is for my wife, Martha," urged Hans, pulling the little woman forward as he spoke. "It is not right that there should be such a difference between us. She does not care to be obliged to look up to me always, so it is for her sake I venture to come before you and entreat you for your assistance."

"This once, perhaps, I will do as you wish," said the King ; "but you must never worry me again with any sort of request. Fairies like to bestow their favours when they are unexpected, not to be obliged to do it to order. Get you hence now, and don't let me see you again."

In an instant the lights went out, and these two people stood alone in the darkness. Not a sound did they hear to suggest the fairies had disappeared, yet

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Hans was quite certain they had vanished, and in silence he started with his wife to find their way out of the wood. But they had not gone very far before an exclamation of indignation from Martha surprised him. "Hans," she said crossly, "you ought to be ashamed of yourself. How dare you keep on pulling my hair? It is most unkind of you. It is bad enough to know the fairies won't help us, but it is cruel of you to tease me too." Then she gave a little shriek. "Don't pull my hair; leave it alone."

Hans stopped walking, in utter amazement, and wished it was light enough for him to see what was the matter with his wife, who was now beginning to cry loudly.

"Martha," he said, bending down so that she could hear better, "I would not harm one hair of your head for all the gold the world contains. I love you too much to hurt you, so let us stop quarrelling and get out of the wood. Perhaps it will be lighter on the road; I am sure I hope so."

"So do I," whimpered Martha; and then, as the baker heard the direction from which the voice came, he clapped his hands with glee. "I know what it is," he declared, "you have begun to grow, and the branches catch in your hair as you walk along. I am wholly free from blame. You are as tall as I am now, so you must take the consequences."

The excitement when Hans returned with his wife

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as tall as himself was tremendous in Little Town. The people crowded round them and made them all kinds of handsome presents, and never seemed to tire of entertaining their two huge neighbours. While the weather remained fine it was delightful, and neither the baker nor his wife objected to being given tea in a field, or in the centre of the market, for all the houses in Little Town were the proper size for its small inhabitants, so it was only in a space not covered in at all that Hans and his wife were able to stand erect. These two people lived only to enjoy themselves, for they had no work to do. Hans had quite given up being a baker; his bakehouse was too small for him to enter, and, as he rightly said, he could not well conduct his business when he could only have one leg in the shop. It was easy, too, to be idle, for all the neighbours, knowing what damage these giants could do in Little Town if they were annoyed, tried to pacify them by large gifts of food, clothes, and everything it was possible for them to need; but the more they had the more they wanted, and each day they became harder to please. At first Martha tried to do her usual share of the housework, but she found it very difficult to move about so smartly since she had become tall, and when, through standing up suddenly in her own tiny kitchen, she drove her head, with her best hat upon it, right through the ceiling into the room above, she decided the time had come for her,

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too, to do nothing. It was not the damage done to the hat she minded, for owing to their generous neighbours she had as many hats as she might wish to spoil, but her children coming back from school unexpectedly, had asked many curious questions about the hole in the floor, and then seemed very amused to think it had been caused by their mother's head. So Hans and his wife left the pretty little house in which they had lived since they married, and, accepting the loan of a large barn from the Mayor, they carried over what they required, and moved in, while the little ones, however, still slept in their own little home as of yore. But it was not very peaceful, for the children gave such a lot of trouble to their parents. When they were all a little family the children appeared to be most well-behaved and lovable, but since the parents had altered they were always in disgrace. Once Martha tripped up over her youngest daughter and fell heavily, for, of course, owing to her height, it was very difficult for her to notice when the children were playing on the floor. But nothing seemed to trouble Hans ; as long as he could sit in the sun with his pipe and do absolutely nothing but admire himself he was happy, and he could not be made to see that the change from a hard-working little baker to a lazy giant was nothing to boast about. Soon, however, the peace in which he lived was to be disturbed, for while basking outside the barn one afternoon his wife came along the street to

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join him, and then, to his amazement, he found she was crying.

"Why, wife," said Hans in some surprise, "why these tears? If you must cry, move away from here, or such big tears will soon form a pond before our door; but dry your eyes and tell me your trouble. I cannot recollect when I saw tears before."

Martha threw over her head an apron that, in other days, had been used as one of the best sheets, and rocking her body to and fro, for a few minutes she thus sat before she dared to say what was in her mind.

"Oh, Hans, forgive me, I pray, but it is about the children. I must speak out."

"Well?" said the baker, coldly, for though he was a very selfish and idle giant, he was devoted to his little ones. "What of the children, pray?"

"I am ashamed of them," cried their mother, wiping her eyes, as she prepared to give her reasons. "They are so small, I can hardly see them, while when I take them out in the streets of Little Town the people mock at them for having such large parents, and mock at me because they do not grow as we have done. We are so superior to our neighbours that I hate to feel we give them cause for laughter. They must be made tall too."

"That's quite impossible," said Hans, firmly. "Quite impossible."

"Why not? They are our children, so they ought

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to grow to a proper large size to match us. Oh, I wish I had never married you ; I would not had I known my children would be out of keeping with their mother. As it is, I am a parent with children so small that they ought not to be my children at all, while they, poor little mites, possess parents much too big to be their father and mother. They shall go to the Fairies' Parliament and have the same favour granted to them, or we must be made small to suit them. I cannot endure to own a family that does not match. Then again, how difficult it is to see what they are doing ! Our youngest child appeared to be a remarkably fine baby when we were small ourselves, and I was very proud of her, and never took my eyes off her in case she should tumble down or get into mischief ; but when she is out with me now, how can I watch her when my head is on a level with the tops of the houses and she is playing in the street below ? It is too stupid, and all your fault. You should have guessed how things would be before you went to the Fairies' Parliament, and made a better arrangement."

"I don't know what we can do," said Hans, thoughtfully, "unless it is to go once more to the Parliament and beg the fairies to reduce your size again, so that you will appear a more suitable mother to your children. I certainly have noticed you looked ridiculous when you took them out."

"You propose that I should return to my original

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height again," screamed the angry woman, "and let you continue to be tall, so that you should get all the admiration and lead the same lazy life while I once more do the work! No! if the fairies are capable of granting one favour, they can grant another. I shall suggest, therefore, that our children are made large also, and then we shall be a most marvellous family. Let us end this dispute and arrange to go to the wood and make known our request."

That night, when the children slept in the little house, Hans and Martha once more set out to the Fairies' Parliament, and this time they found their way quite easily. Everything happened as before, and when they were again in the presence of the Fairies' King and Queen they lost no time in making known their wants. Their Majesties listened in silence to the third favour they were asked to grant, and when the baker and his wife finished speaking, no time was lost in consenting to do as they wished, for both the King and the Queen were so disgusted with these people frequently returning for fresh favours that they felt they did not want to see them or even remain in the same wood with them.

So the visit was a brief one, and Hans and his wife decided to sleep contentedly beneath the roadside hedge when it was over, for they knew the gates of Little Town would be closed for the night, and they resolved to arrive at the house in time for breakfast.

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But, on returning in the morning, they were surprised to find everybody rushing wildly about the streets, so, thinking it must mean that their house was on fire, the baker and his wife began to run, too. They reached their home, however, to find it looked just as it did the previous night, when they had left the tiny children safely tucked up in their beds before they started out to the Parliament ; but as they stood gazing up at the closed windows they were horrified to hear muffled shrieks coming from within.

"Listen !" said all the neighbours who were standing about outside. "There it is again ! They have been screaming like that all night, and we could not get in, for you had locked the door, lest they should stray, I suppose. What can be the matter ? I don't believe they can move or they would come down and let us in. There is another scream. Oh, what can it be ?"

The baker's wife leant against the side of the house and gave a little laugh as she stared at the perplexed crowd around her.

"I know what it is," she declared. "The dear children have grown in the night just as we did, and now, though the rooms are too small to hold them, they cannot escape. See, Hans," she went on, breaking the glass of one of the bedroom windows of the first floor, "there they are, the four of them, growing enormous. All right, darlings," she called to the children, who ceased to cry at the sound of a voice



She turned and saw the crowd of small people watching her.

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they knew. "Mother is coming to help you. She and Daddy are going to lift the roof off, and you will be able to slip out and all will be well. You will be free in a minute."

Eager hands assisted them, and soon the roof was removed and the four trembling children stood in the street by the side of their parents, who did not trouble to thank anybody for helping them. And what large children they had become, to be sure !

Martha's heart swelled more than ever with pride as she looked at her enormous family while they stood blinking in the sun. They were so wonderful that again and again she kissed them in sheer delight. But suddenly she turned and saw the crowd of small people watching her, and at once she realised how little and unimportant they appeared to be. "Not worth speaking to," she told herself ; "there is no credit in knowing such tiny people."

"Go away," she said haughtily, quite forgetting that it was to some of her oldest friends she spoke so rudely. "Go back to your homes and your own work. Why do you want to stare so ? Have you no manners, or are you so small there is no room for any ?"

The enlarged children were a great success, for Hans and Martha were never tired of admiring them and praising each other for their cleverness in having found the Fairies' Parliament ; but, nevertheless, as time went on, these two people became unbearable. So great

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was their conceit that they refused to speak to their neighbours, for they felt it was really lowering to their dignity to be seen in conversation with those so far beneath them. Their big children were taken away from school directly their parents discovered that among all the pupils there was not one the correct size for the little giants to play with. Hans had long ago given up attempting to work, and he and his wife were two striking examples of haughty pride as they swaggered about the streets of Little Town or loafed together in the sun.

But at last the baker called his wife to him and made a suggestion, which she received with the greatest pleasure.

“My dear,” said he, “I propose we go and live in Big Town, which is certainly more worthy to count us among its inhabitants than this little place. I am tired of these cramped streets and the puny people who walk about in them. We are so wonderful now that we ought to go to a large town among large people who are fit to be our companions. I want to be properly appreciated. These tiny creatures are far too small to value us in the way we should be valued. They even dare to think I ought to work at my baking still. Just imagine such nonsense! I, indeed, who am the most wonderful person in all the world! We are too good for them, my dear, that is the truth, so let us turn our backs on Little Town and the unimportant people it contains.”

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The next morning, therefore, Hans and Martha and the four large children left the place where they had been born and bred, and, full of belief in their own cleverness and powers of attraction, set off to Big Town, where they were convinced they would have a very warm welcome.

All the way along the road they spoke of what they intended to do when they were settled in their new home, and their heads were so full of plans for the future that they had nearly forgotten they had ever lived in Little Town before they had gone half the journey. Not one regret had they for the friends they had left behind them, the faithful friends of many years whom they had begun to look down upon, for they had got the idea into their silly heads that the only people worth cultivating were tall people, and these in the future were all they were determined to know.

So, quite content with themselves, the baker and his wife and family strode through the gates of Big Town, pushing many people aside in their eagerness to enter and walk freely among the huge folk they could see moving about the streets. But though they had an idea they were so wonderful that the Giants of Big Town could not resist their attractions, yet, when they took up their abode among them, it did not appear that their neighbours troubled their heads a tiny bit about the new arrivals. Nobody desired to make their

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acquaintance, or even went so far as to enquire their names, and when they passed the inhabitants in the streets, not one would look at them twice. Soon, however, matters changed for the worse ; for Hans, with the little money he had saved in happier days, set up a bakery with which he intended to astonish the town and let them taste what real good bread was like. He hated being obliged to work again, but he had made the unpleasant discovery that larger children meant larger appetites, and a great deal more material in their clothes, so he felt somewhat anxious concerning their future. From the manner in which the people who dwelt in the place behaved, he guessed he and his family were far from popular. “Lanky upstart !” said one giant to another as he walked past the baker’s shop one morning. “Who wants them living in our town ? But they won’t remain long, I am sure, when they find how difficult it is to go on making bread if nobody comes to buy it. Ha !—ha !—ha !”

And that Hans found to be the truth. While he lived in Little Town he was considered to be one of the finest bakers they possessed, and he never had a loaf left over from the morning’s batch ; but somehow in Big Town everything was different. The few customers he had, never ceased to grumble about the quality of the bread he sold them : it was too soft to suit their great sharp teeth was the true reason of their discontent, for Hans, accustomed to bake for little people, made the

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bread so fine that, when the giants did venture to buy a loaf, they found there was nothing for them to bite in it. These foolish people lived in a great house just as their giant neighbours did, for there were no small buildings in Big Town, though, indeed, had there been, they would have been quite useless for Hans' family, but a large house meant a quantity of work for Martha, who, poor woman, never seemed to have a moment's rest or peace of mind. In the beginning the children were sent to school, but the other pupils soon found out the baker's family had been really born to be small, and they teased the new arrivals so much that at last the children refused to go there, or even walk in the street when the school-children were released from their lessons. Soon the little pile of money became less and less, and each day the look of anxiety on Martha's face deepened, for she knew the winter was coming, and what was she to do for food and clothing for them all? Now that it was too late she saw her mistake, and bitterly repented trying to set up a business in a place where she was not wanted nor made welcome.

"Oh, why was not I content?" she would say. "I should never have allowed Hans to come here. And directly I saw how great he had become I should have persuaded him to be turned back to his own small size instead of craving to become large also. Our clothes are shabby, and the children look white and thin, and we have no money left and no friends to help us." So

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she called her husband to her side, and together they discussed the situation. Hans saw how wrong he had been, and the only desire he had in the world was to get away from Big Town and to make up for his idleness by working doubly hard when he had the chance. "We have not succeeded in making anybody here think we were truly one of the big people, and we have failed utterly to attain any sort of position or win the respect of our neighbours. If ever we want to be prosperous and happy again, looked up to, and believed in by our friends, we must humble our wicked pride, seek once more the Fairies' Parliament, and beg the King and Queen to restore us again to our rightful size and let us get back to Little Town—the place we should never have left."

"We have had so many favours granted us already by their Majesties," said Martha. "I am sure they will refuse to help us."

"You never know until you try," Hans declared brightly, for his heart began to feel lighter directly he thought there was any chance of their getting back to their old home. "We have made a terrible mistake. Let us hope the fairies will be merciful."

In the night, therefore, when all the giants were sleeping contentedly in their great big beds, Hans and Martha woke and dressed the children; then, with a few pence in an old purse and some slices of the despised bread in their hands, they stepped out of

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the house in which they had been living, and stole softly down the streets and through the gates of the town. But the way seemed very long and the path that led to the wood was rough and stony, and though Hans and Martha often stumbled they had no time to complain, as they were so busy helping the children, for neither parents wanted them to cut their great feet, and it was far too dark for them to see the stones. This time, however, no animal appeared to guide them, and they had to find their way as best they could. Often they stopped to argue, for, however unhappy Martha was, she was always ready and able to give her opinion, whether it was wanted or not, but at last in the distance they saw the flickering lights which, just as before, used to shine for a few minutes and then, after disappearing, would continue to twinkle in another part of the wood. This sight so delighted poor tired Martha that she dragged her large children along by the hand as fast as possible; for she was really afraid the Parliament sitting would be over before they had time to speak; but she need not have hurried so, for when they arrived in the centre of it, everything looked just as if it had only just opened. There were their Majesties seated on the same throne, the only difference being that the Queen looked more beautiful than ever, while the King had a stern, cold expression about his lips which made Hans fearfully nervous when the royal gaze was fixed upon him.

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"Surely this is Hans the baker," the monarch declared with a bitter laugh, "and his wife, too. Another favour, I suppose, is to be granted. You are a good beggar, Hans. You have been here many times before. Are you never to have enough?"

"There is only one thing now I have come to ask for," replied Hans, who was far too much in earnest to be checked by the annoyed air of the fairy ruler. "If you will only grant me that, I will never seek you again as long as I live. I shall be able to support my wife and family by my earnings in the Little Town. I know I shall."

"Little Town," echoed the King. "So you want to get back there, do you?"

"Oh, so much, so much," broke in Martha, who could not keep silent any longer. "We did wrong ever to leave. Let us become the same small people we used to be; turn us and our children back to our original size is the favour we want to ask. We are so unhappy as we are."

"Listen to me, Hans and Martha," said the King very seriously. "When it was first in our power to grant you any desire you cared to name, Hans begged to be made as tall as the giants who dwell in Big Town. He thought of nothing but to gratify himself, and when we did as he wished, instead of turning to advantage his wonderful height and working extra hard to surround his wife with comforts, what did

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he do? He became idle and discontented, and taught you to be the same, until the wish to be tall was so strong within you that a second visit was paid to this Parliament. And then the fairies said one to another, 'Now this large man has a large wife to help him, and we will watch and see how hard they work for the sake of their children.' But no, the second favour made you even more conceited and foolish than ever, and you both began to imagine you were better than everybody else living in Little Town, and that you were far too clever to mix with those who, until recently, had been good friends to you. Once more your discontent brought you to us, and at your request your children were made to suit you; but even that was useless, for so important had you become in your own estimation that you must needs go and live among the giants in Big Town itself. In your early days the fault began by you constantly envying the giants who were your neighbours. Many an hour have you wasted yearning to become as tall as they were. You had commenced to neglect your baking and your home a long while before you came to our Parliament. And now that you have lost your money, your home, and your friends, you come back to beg yet another favour. What will you do if I grant your request? This time what are we to see?"

"You will see us happy again, your Majesty, glad to be able to work hard, to live peacefully within our

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little home, and to endeavour to add to our tiny hoard of savings year by year. If you will only do as we beseech you, you shall have no cause to be disappointed in us. We see how wrong we have been, and we have learnt our lesson too well ever to forget it again."

"Your lesson?" echoed the King. "Tell me now what it is!"

"To be satisfied with our own lot in life, never to aspire to greatness we do not deserve, never to crave to gain a position our birth does not entitle us to—to endeavour always to be content."

"Yes," said the Queen, who had been listening intently to this conversation. "Above all things, learn to be content. Therein lies the secret of true happiness."

After this little talk with Hans and Martha, the King, seeing how deeply in earnest they were, consented to grant their request to change them back to their original size again. He watched the look of joy which came over their faces when they felt themselves begin to shrink, and when they saw that their children were allowed to become small, too, their delight knew no bounds. As each child got quite tiny in its turn, it was warmly embraced by the baker and his wife, who were so pleased to have their wish given them that it was not until a few minutes had passed that they thought of thanking their Majesties for their goodness. When they turned to do so, how-

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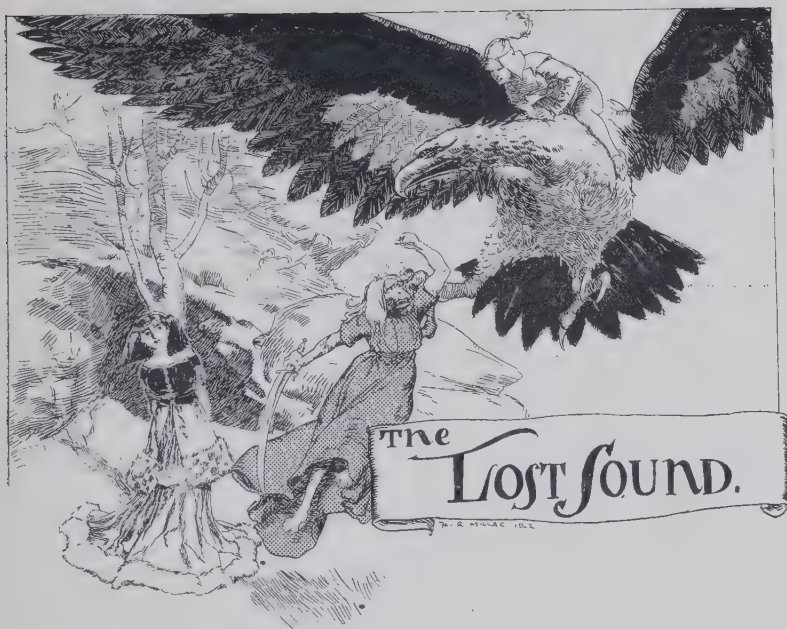
ever, it was too late. Every trace of the Fairies' Parliament had vanished; even the flickering lights had been put out and the family of little people were quite alone among the trees. Full of cheerfulness, they made their way on to the road once more, and though they were a long distance from Little Town they set out to walk home without uttering one word of complaint. As Hans remarked, "every step took them further away from Big Town and brought them nearer to their home, which was what they desired, so why need they grumble about the length of the road?"

And in time they reached the gates of Little Town, and the inhabitants, with hearts full of forgiveness for the manner in which they had been treated, came out from their homes to welcome the new arrivals back.

Loving hands helped them to set their small house in order and to repair the damaged bakehouse, so that very soon Hans and Martha were able to open their little shop again and to serve the customers who came flocking to their door to buy bread. Day by day their happiness increased and their prosperity also. Hans was very hard-working and thoughtful for his wife's comfort, while she quickly lost the anxious look she had worn while they were in Big Town, and she never seemed happy unless she was busy in her tiny house or, when the day's work was done, sitting out of doors to watch the setting sun, while they spoke

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with gratitude of the Fairies' Parliament and the lesson it had taught them. And though Hans and Martha lived to be very, very old they never forgot again that contentment was the finest treasure they could possess, and that to learn to be satisfied was better than wealth or even a great position, while the chief thought in their hearts was one of gladness that they were allowed to give up their folly before it was too late.



ONCE upon a time there dwelt on an island a little boy whose name was Dodan. He was terribly lonely, for the place was so small that, except for an old monk who used to teach him, he had nobody to talk with beyond his parents and a few fisher-folk ; while, unfortunately, there were no children with whom he could romp and play games. So Dodan grew to be a very quiet, serious-minded youth, who thought before he spoke, and never did anything foolish or base ; but as time went on it was noticed that his eyes often wandered to the distant mainland which

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could be seen on a fine day, and for hours he would sit and listen to the sounds the wind sometimes carried towards him. Occasionally peals of laughter would be borne on the breeze ; but, though it interested Dodan, he was not able to recognise it until, in his perplexity, he sought out the monk, who was generally near his charge, and with eager hands drew him to the spot where he could hear best.

“Listen,” he said. “Do you know what that noise is ? Tell me, if you do.”

The stern look in the eyes of the monk faded away, while the lines round his mouth straightened themselves out, and he bent his lips into a wry smile as he made reply :

“That is the sound of a child’s laugh. It comes across the water to gladden our ears—the sweetest melody in all the world.”

And Dodan guessed from his companion’s face that his thoughts had flown swiftly back to his own home and the happy days of childhood he had passed there ; so for a few moments there was silence between the two, until at last the youth spoke again.

“Oh, my master,” he said gravely, “I read in an old musty volume in our library yesterday that a sound once created never dies, but travels forward on the wings of the wind until all trace of it is lost.”

“’Tis even so,” replied the other. “But what of that ?”

The Lost Sound

"This, then !" cried the youth, leaping to his feet as he spoke. "I will capture the sounds that come from yonder shore, and retain them for my own pleasure. I have never heard these familiar notes of childhood, but soon shall they be mine. I will catch the merry laughter as it leaves the land, for I am anxious to see what it is like."

But the monk shook his head incredulously.

"It is not possible, Dodan," he said. "Get you back to your studies, and put aside such dreams and nonsense, I implore you."

Dodan shook his head ; and, seeing how determined he was, his master decided it was better not to oppose him, so he began to discuss it seriously, until, as he heard the youth's scheme, the monk, too, became enthusiastic.

"I will scale yonder cliff," said the lad, "and in a little niche there I will place three open boxes to catch any sounds that may be wandering in the air. It is on the cliff that I hear them best when they float across the sea, therefore I am sure that in time I shall find what I desire in one of the boxes."

So Dodan and the monk went to the foot of the cliff, and the old man stood anxiously watching his charge clamber up the face of it and carefully lay on a little ledge the tiny boxes he brought with him. When he was safely down, the two walked off together, and did not approach the cliff again until the boy was sure he

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must have caught some of the many sounds that had of late gone flitting by.

Trembling with excitement, Dodan secured the three boxes, and was soon standing by the monk's side, so eager to see the contents that his hand shook almost too much for him to do anything.

After inspecting the interior of the first box, he raised his head, and silently handed it to the old man, who was equally curious.

"Ashes," said Dodan, in great disappointment. "What can ashes mean?"

The monk had lived many years in the world, and the wisdom he had gathered therein now helped him.

"Ashes," he said sadly, "mean anger." And then his eyes became dim when he saw what was in the second box, which was so full he could hardly lift it.

"It is full of pearls," said Dodan wonderingly. "Pearls of all sizes."

The monk sighed as he saw them.

"Pearls are the sound of sorrow," he said regretfully. "Ah me! how many hearts have cried aloud in their pain before this box was filled? Why, what is the matter?" he asked, as Dodan threw away the last in great disgust.

"It is empty," said the youth. "Quite empty."

But when the old man picked it up he saw that it was not so.

"Indeed, you are wrong," he assured him. "See,

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it contains the most precious of all sounds—that of childish laughter.”

And as Dodan looked more carefully, he saw the monk was right. Little tiny flecks of gold lay on the bottom of the box—pure gold, which glistened as the sun’s rays fell on it.

“How beautiful!” he exclaimed. “I have never seen anything so perfect before, and they have all come from one source, as they are so much alike.”

“’Tis some little maiden, no doubt,” said the monk dreamily, “who has laughed like this—the pure laughter of a child who is content, and therefore happy.”

“If that is so,” replied Dodan, with determination, “my way lies easily before me. I will never rest until the light-hearted owner of this golden laughter is my wife. I will go to yonder land and seek her, no matter where she be.”

And though the monk reasoned and argued with his charge, nothing would alter the lad’s decision, though, indeed, after much entreaty he was induced to wait before he set out on his quest. Well he knew how difficult it would be for him to trace the owner of such a merry laugh; but nevertheless he was determined to do so, and he counted the days to the time when he would be released from his studies and be free. A few months later, however, he again set the boxes in the accustomed places on the cliff, meaning to secure some more golden flecks of laughter; but to his disappoint-

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ment the second time they were full of nothing but pearls, and somehow, as Dodan looked upon them, his heart grew heavy and sad, and his spirits sank within him.

“What trouble has come to the land,” he asked himself wonderingly, “that the only sounds should be those of sorrow? Perhaps a great war convulses them; or a terrible sickness has laid many loved ones low, and by its ravages caused aching hearts to cry out in pain. Whatever it is, I must know; therefore this very night, if the tide serves, will I sail over and ascertain the truth.”

So late that evening, without bidding farewell to anybody and contenting himself by leaving a note of explanation for his mother, Dodan set out towards the mysterious land in his own boat, and with each stroke of the oars he felt more eager to arrive at his destination. As he drew close to the shore he noticed the air of desolation that overspread every part of the town, and as he prepared to land he saw the women were standing about at the street corners talking and gesticulating wildly, and only pausing in their conversations to reprimand the children, who clung tearfully to their mothers' skirts. Full of wonder, Dodan walked slowly away from his boat and stood looking about him. So he had, at last, set foot on the mysterious land. But how different was his actual arrival from the one he had so often pictured in his imagination! Feeling a

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little depressed, he drew near a group of women, and by a courteous question sought to learn the nature of the trouble they all seemed suffering from. With a look of surprise to think anybody could be so ignorant, they instantly began to tell him what was the matter, but as they all spoke at once Dodan held up his hand for silence before he singled out one old crone to narrate the truth to him. And this old woman, who had lived long, knew well the value of speech, therefore she spoke briefly and very much to the point.

"The Princess Oyeyama has been stolen by the Monkey-Faced Witch," she said, "and though we all know where she is, yet none of us are able to recover her."

"Poor little Princess!" cried Dodan sympathetically. "Where is the witch hiding her?"

"In a cave on yonder hill," explained the old woman, "and on a clear day we can see her white garments as she moves about to do her mistress's cruel bidding. Alas, that we cannot rescue her!"

"But why?" asked Dodan, feeling somewhat puzzled. "That hill appears to be close to the town. Is there no man here brave enough to risk the anger of the Witch?"

"Plenty—plenty!" cried the women, eager to defend their relations from any insinuation of cowardice. "But the Witch has power over trees and streams, and when the rescuing party starts the trees

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grow larger and their branches become so thick that they cannot be penetrated, while the tiny trickling stream swells into a river that no boat can safely cross."

And then Dodan realised what he must do. While this cloud of gloom rested over the town it was most unlikely that he would again hear the trill of merry laughter that had so attracted him ; so he determined to rescue this unknown Princess from the clutches of the Witch, not because he was particularly interested in her, but because he wanted to revive the mirth and happiness that used to exist over the land. It was really most vexatious, he felt in his secret heart, that such a thing should have occurred just now, but he was determined to find the maiden he sought, no matter what obstacles blocked the way. But how to reach the Princess ? Up and down the deserted street Dodan paced as he conceived plan after plan, all of which, however, he cast away as impossible after a few seconds' thought. While he was turning his head restlessly from side to side, his eye caught a faint reflection of himself in an adjacent window, and as he noted his cap with its long plume, he gave a little cry of triumph, and snatching it off his head he began to pull the feather to pieces, chanting as he did so :—

" He hears me, he don't,
He'll help me, he won't,
He would if he could,
But he can't."

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Before he had finished this little rhyme for the third time Dodan saw floating in the distance a tiny wee speck, which gradually increased in size as it drew near, until, when it paused over the village, it proved to be the largest bird you could imagine. As it fluttered down into the street its back was so broad that it touched the houses on either side of it, while its head could quite conveniently find a pillow among the chimney pots on the roofs.

"Are you the Bird of Good Omen?" asked Dodan, nervously wondering what he should do if the bird denied it. But he need not have feared, for this strange-looking creature nodded his head so violently that his beak hit the slates on the roof, cracking many and causing others to fall on to the pavement below.

"I want you to help me," said Dodan, politely, trying to dodge the broken slates as he spoke. "It is just a little thing, and one which you can easily do."

But the Bird of Good Omen did not look particularly pleased at the idea of doing anything, and he tried to open his wings and shake them, until, finding that impossible, he struck the ground heavily with his claws several times.

"Why do you call me up if it is to make me work?" he grumbled. "I have a great mind to do nothing just to prove I will not be ordered about by you."

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"Excuse me for mentioning such a thing," said Dodan kindly, "but let me remind you that having once built your nest on our island, we are entitled to exact a yearly service from you. This is the first request that has been made for many years, I know ; so I must beg you to grant it."

And the Bird of Good Omen, though he scowled and fussed a great deal, was obliged to admit the truth of the statement, so he tried to make the best of it by asking what he was to do.

In few words Dodan told him the story of the captive Princess, and the spell which the Monkey-Faced Witch cast over the trees and river that surrounded the cave, but a strange feeling of shyness prevented him speaking of the musical laugh he had heard, and his determination to find the owner of it. He knew that if he could raise the cloud of sorrow from the nation, his task would be simple, so he did his best to urge the bird to help him, and with such success, too, that he was soon upon its broad back and holding on to its brown feathers to prevent himself slipping off and being dashed to pieces ; for directly he was mounted, this odd creature slightly moved his wings, and they soared up and up, like a new kind of balloon. All went well until they had flown to a spot from which, looking down, they could see the cave and the Witch, smoking her short clay pipe as she watched the young Princess trying to

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perform tasks for which she was quite unsuited. When the Witch saw what fluttered in the air above her she wanted to hide the maiden, until, remembering the Bird of Good Omen could see everything, she decided the best thing to do was to bind her to a tree and then fight the intruder herself. So, in spite of screams and yells, Oyeyama was tightly tied to the tree, and the Monkey-Faced Witch stood ready before her while she awaited the arrival of Dodan and the bird, who were every minute rapidly drawing nearer the earth. Keeping a watchful eye on the Princess, the Witch became so excited that she forgot all about herself as she tried to protect her captive by waving a large sword, until she felt a strange grip upon her, and she was lifted from the ground and held fast between the bird's talons.

"Let me go! Let me go!" she shrieked, "or I will cast spells over you that will be your ruin."

"You cannot," Dodan reminded her. "You forget your charms, spells, and incantations cease to work when you are in the air. When we put you down you can do what you like."

"Where are we going?" sobbed the Witch, who now became humble as she realised how she had lost her power.

The Bird of Good Omen gave a harsh chuckle as he spoke.

"We are going to deposit you on a distant land,

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where, at any rate, your evil gifts will have the charm of novelties. We know by heart what you are capable of. When you have been safely dropped——”

“Dropped?” screamed the poor old thing, and even Dodan shuddered.

“It won’t hurt, really,” was the reply. “We will let you go over a nice soft spot. A lake is a good thing to fall into. A hayrick is so small, you might miss it. After you go, we return to rescue the Princess, who is doubtless thinking she has been forgotten and left to starve. By the by, you might tell us why you stole her at all. Oyeyama was too young to have done you any harm.”

“True,” grumbled the Monkey-Faced Witch. “But the King, her father, wanted me driven out of the land, and as I went up to the palace to bewitch him the Princess was playing in the garden, and the happy laughter of herself and her companions irritated me very much, until I remembered how easily I could punish her father by taking her from his side. She was very friendly, and asked me to rest, but I only stayed long enough to give her a charmed blossom which made her follow me even to the cave itself. I am sorry I did it, as it has caused me a great deal of annoyance.”

“You will regret it more yet,” muttered the Bird of Good Omen, as he gave a sudden swoop towards the land, and stopped in the air exactly above a large lake

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that glittered like silver in the sunshine. "We are going back to the Princess now," he went on calmly. "But you will be all right if you don't struggle as you fall. Good-bye! Remember, you would not be thus exiled from your native land if only you had been good, but perhaps after this lesson you will behave better." And before Dodan could interfere, this cruel bird opened his claws and let the old Witch fall down, down, down! Dodan could not bear to look, so he closed his eyes until his companion spoke again.

"She's all right," he announced. "Dropped right into the centre of the lake. She can swim like a fish, so she'll come to no harm. Look at her! See, she has reached the shore, and is now shaking her fist at me. Ha! ha! Good-bye, old thing! Good-bye!"

As Dodan knew they were returning to the cave again to release the Princess his thoughts naturally were full of the other damsel he was seeking. It was a nuisance, he decided, having to go out of his way to rescue Oyeyama at all. But perhaps, in return for his kindness, she would be able to help him trace the owner of the merry laugh; so he did his best to look pleasant as they came down to earth just in front of the tree to which the damsel was still tied. In a few seconds Dodan had loosened the cords that bound her, and with great deference he led her towards the Bird of Good Omen and assisted her on to his back.

"Will you not come, too?" she asked, as Dodan did

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not move ; but the youth shook his head. At last he was free to search for the maiden whose bright laughter had captivated his heart, and he was determined to waste no more time. He knew the Princess was safe while in charge of the bird, so, with a sigh of relief, he watched them start for the palace before he turned away.

For days and days he wandered about the land still seeking the maiden whom he longed to wed ; but though much laughter fell on his ears, he heard none that resembled that which he sought. The days passed into weeks—long, weary weeks—until Dodan felt so miserable and disheartened that he was almost determined to give up his quest. Indeed, he returned to the town with the idea of going back once more to his island home, for he had begun to feel he was never to succeed.

As he walked down the streets he was again struck by the silence in them, until, as he met the old woman who had previously explained matters to him, he besought her to tell him what was wrong.

She eyed him up and down scornfully before she spoke, and then it was very gruffly.

“Oh!” she said. “It was you, wasn’t it, who brought our Princess back from the Monkey-Faced Witch?” And when Dodan nodded his head she went on, “You had better have left her there,” she declared. “Princess Oyeyama has altered so much

The Lost Sound

that none know her for the merry, light-hearted maiden who used to dance and sing all day about the palace. But you can judge for yourself, for see, here comes the royal carriage, with their Majesties taking their afternoon drive."

So at last Dodan understood what brought the cloud on the town. How could the inhabitants laugh and be merry if their beloved Princess was making herself ill for some unknown cause? He gazed at Oyeyama pityingly as she drove swiftly towards him, and he had time to note her pale cheek and sad little mouth before she raised her eyes and looked at him. And then, what a change! The colour flooded her face, she jumped to her feet, and ordered the coachman to stop.

"See!" she cried. "Here is my deliverer come at last. Oh, why did you desert me after rescuing me from the Witch?" she went on reproachfully to Dodan, who stood bare-headed at the side of the carriage listening to her words.

"Princess, I—I——" he began, not knowing quite what to say; but once more she interrupted him.

"No matter," she said with a happy laugh. "Do not bother to explain. I am glad—oh, so glad!—to see you."

The sound of her mirth had startled Dodan considerably, and in an instant the truth flashed across him. Eagerly and tenderly he told to the Princess the

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story of his love for the owner of the laugh. His voice grew wistful as he described the dreary days he had spent searching for her, but when he told of his determination to wed her he threw back his head and looked her full in the face.

“’Tis a sad story, Dodan,” she remarked thoughtfully. “Sad, for it tells of days of trouble. But you speak as if it is all past and over. Tell me, have you found at last the owner of the laugh, and are you still ready to wed her !”

Dodan bent forward, and softly kissed the Princess’s pretty face.

“Indeed, I have found her,” he replied, as the love light in his eyes aroused an awakening gleam in her own, “and I am only waiting to wed her until——”

“Until what ?” echoed the Princess, blushing at the ardour of his gaze.

“Until she names the day,” said Dodan gladly.



AS Dolly, the laundrymaid, threw open the door of the laundry, she gave a sigh of relief; for it pleased her to think that her work was over, and she was free for a little while. Behind her stood great baskets filled with the linen which was waiting to be borne to the Palace, and everything she had been using was tidied up and laid by. The big coppers were empty, and the fires were nearly dead; while the irons that had been busily employed a short time ago, were now placed on one side and allowed to cool. The girl glanced idly down the road, and was just turning away, when she saw a quaint-looking figure coming towards her and holding out a hand as though begging for alms.

“Who are you?” said Dolly curiously, noting the little man’s bright eyes and large ears, “and what do you want?”

“I am a fairy,” was the unexpected reply. “I

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left Fairyland very early this morning, and have to go a great distance away to deliver a message for the Fairy Queen, and seeing you stand at your door doing nothing, I thought I would ask you to help me."

"Oh, I cannot be bothered," said Dolly crossly. "I have only just got through my own work. The royal wash this week has been a very heavy one, and I am tired."

"Tired!" echoed the fairy-man. "Is that all? I don't think anything of that. I am hungry also. You look so plump and rosy, it is easy to see *you* are well fed. You might give me something to eat. You could easily spare it."

"Could I, indeed?" retorted the girl. "Well, what will you have?" she queried, with a mischievous twinkle in her eye. "Bread or cake?"

Now this fairy had one fault, which, I regret to say, was greediness; so directly he heard Dolly's remark he clapped his hands together in great excitement, and cried, "Cake, please. Give me cake. Lots and lots of it!" And when the girl held it towards him he instantly seized it from her hands and dug his teeth in it; but in a second he gave a howl of rage and threw it upon the ground.

"How dare you! How dare you!" he shrieked shrilly.

For a long while Dolly laughed so much she was not able to speak; but when she did so, it was only to

The Royal Laundry

mock at her companion's distress, whilst she gathered up the cakes as they lay on the ground and put them back in the laundry to use another time. "You did not say what kind of cake you wanted," she giggled; "so I thought a cake of soap would be a change for you. Ha! ha! I am sure you do not have that sort of thing in Fairyland."

"No," said the little man crossly, "we do not; but we have other things—several ways of punishing unkindness, for instance."

"What do you mean?" asked Dolly, somewhat anxiously; for already she remembered many stories she had heard of the revenge taken by fairies, and she began to regret her ill-timed joke.

But the man shook his fist at her as he left the door. "We shall see," he cried threateningly; "we shall see," and until he was quite out of sight Dolly could hear him grumbling to himself and uttering vile imprecations against the royal laundry and everything belonging to it.

At first it seemed as though nothing was going to happen, for the work went on just the same; but soon, however, a terrible discovery was made. Everything that was washed in the royal laundry began to shrink. The sheets used upon the beds in the Palace shrunk until they looked like pocket-handkerchiefs, while the pocket-handkerchiefs themselves became the size of postage stamps; the beautiful white lace petticoats

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that her Majesty wore shrunk so rapidly that it was all that the Princess Nadja, who was only four years old, could do to wear them as frocks; while the fine silk stockings came back just large enough to fit some of the wax dolls in the nursery. The table-cloths had to be used as table-napkins, and the pillow-cases were just the right size to be made into lavender bags. In fact, each article that was put into the royal coppers speedily diminished in size until it was useless. Unfortunately, there was a law which forbade any of the royal linen being put out to be washed; so for a time the Queen bore it in silence, until her royal husband began to have trouble with his shirts, and then he made such a fuss about it that the whole story had to be unfolded to him, to see what he advised.

Now the King was a wily king, and feeling sure in his own heart that the copper had been bewitched by the fairy whom the laundry maid had treated so badly, he determined not to interfere himself, but to consult the Court Wizard, who, though old in years, was very clever and skilful in his knowledge and practice of magic.

Dolly, the laundry maid, now bitterly ashamed of her folly and full of repentance, told her story to the Court Wizard, who listened most attentively until she had finished, then he raised his head and spoke.

"It is a sad story," he said pompously; "and it is quite evident to me that the entire laundry is under a spell."

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"Under a spell!" echoed the Queen contemptuously, remembering her ruined linen as she spoke. "Under a spell, indeed! I should just think it was. But so much, O Wizard, we knew before. We have sent for you to tell us what to do."

Her Majesty had always disliked the Wizard, and she could hardly bear to listen to his foolish observations, until the King, seeing her indignation, laid his hand upon hers and patted it soothingly.

"My dear, my dear," he whispered gently, "pray be calm. The Royal Wizard is now an elderly man, and to such we must show patience. In time we, too, shall be old and perhaps garrulous, and then we should dislike to be harassed."

"None could harass me," declared her Majesty haughtily, "for I am the Queen."

"Nor me," said the King, with happy inspiration, "for I am the King. Well, as we are safe, let us hurry on the old man. It seems as though he has gone to sleep."

Slowly the Wizard propounded his conviction that the only way by which to break the spell was to bathe in the copper the purest treasure the kingdom held. Her Majesty's face grew pale with fear, for she knew what was the most valuable possession in the realm; but as she listened to the guesses made by everybody present, she became calmer, for she felt she was safe.

"I cannot have my crown dipped," said the King

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nervously. "The stones are too rare to meddle with."

"Oh, your crown is no good," replied the Wizard with contempt; "there are other crowns far greater than yours."

"Impossible," replied the King, giving him an icy glance, before he relapsed into a deep silence as he thought out a plan by which he could procure a more costly crown at once.

"There are some wonderfully precious manuscripts in the library," said the Royal Librarian sadly; "they are really priceless, and could never be replaced. They shall be immersed in the copper if it is necessary, though I fear the ink will run, and render them worthless afterwards."

"Manuscripts!" exclaimed the Wizard with scorn. "*Pulp!* What a silly notion." And then, fixing his eyes on the Queen, he spoke again. "Has your Majesty no idea what is the purest treasure in the kingdom?" he said curiously.

The Queen rose and faced the entire Court, and though her lips were very white, she held herself erect, and spoke bravely.

"Yes, I have," she replied, "and it belongs to me. The purest, greatest treasure in this land is my little daughter, the Princess Nadja, and if the Wizard will make himself responsible for her safety I will allow her to be bathed in the copper."

The Royal Laundry

And so it was settled. The royal laundry was converted into a wonderful pavilion, the walls hung with rich tapestry, while gaily-coloured flags waved outside close to the bandstand which had been specially erected for the occasion, and a bell pealed out loudly when at a certain hour the royal procession was seen to approach. The King and the Queen were present, the Court Wizard, the Royal Physician, the Lord Chamberlain, the chief of the nursery and all the under nurses, Dolly the laundry maid, and—last but not least—the Royal Scent Maker, who had been allowed to perfume the water which now filled the copper. In fact, everybody you could mention was present, for it was to be treated as a serious State ceremony, and no name was omitted from the invitation list.

His Majesty insisted upon dipping the fourth finger of his left hand into the water to test the heat of it, and this he did several times, for he liked to feel himself of importance. Really, he did nothing but get in the way of everybody ; and as the laundry was rather small, he could have well been spared, but though this idea came into the minds of many present, none liked to suggest it ; so the King was allowed to remain.

There was only one person who seriously objected to the ceremony, and that was the young Princess, who shouted and screamed at the top of her voice. She was attired in a pretty little satin bathing dress specially

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woven for the occasion ; but when Dolly, the laundry maid, drew near to gently dip her in the water, her sobs were piteous to listen to. But it was speedily over, and the royal child was slumbering peacefully in her cot before the marks of her tears were dry on her rosy face.

But in the morning the royal nurse rushed to the Queen's apartment with a terrible tale to tell, and almost before she had completed her sad story the news began to spread about the Palace, and everybody was full of sorrow. Instead of the spell being removed from the coppers of the laundry after her Royal Highness had been bathed therein, the only result was that the little Princess herself had shrunk into a tiny baby again, while the hands of the laundry maid, which had got wet when she dipped the Princess Nadja, had become so small as to be useless. The King himself had not escaped either, for the fourth finger of his left hand had been affected by the same spell, and was quite wee in size.

The fury of the people when they learnt of this fresh disaster to the royal family knew no bounds ; and, heedless alike of the King's command or the Queen's entreaty, they rushed to the home of the Wizard, and after a severe struggle—for this wise man, though elderly, was hale and hearty—they dipped him many times in the bewitched copper, for they felt he was partly responsible for the fate that had overtaken the



THE YOUNG PRINCESS SHOUTED AND SCREAMED AT THE TOP OF HER VOICE.

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pretty little Princess, and they were determined to punish him severely. Anxiously they watched him until they were satisfied that the shrinking process had begun, then they carried him back to his home, and would have left him there to die—for the wise man showed his wisdom by living quite alone—had not the Queen, tender-hearted even in her distress, sent a special messenger, and had the funny-looking, elderly infant brought to her.

And, side by side in the royal nursery, did the Princess and the Wizard, both suddenly altered to tiny babies, live together in harmony, and, except for childish squabbles over their rattles, they seemed to agree very well. In time the people who dwelt near the Palace grounds grew accustomed to the presence of the two odd babies that were wheeled out daily in a double perambulator ; and though her Majesty never ceased to grieve over the alteration in her daughter, the love that her heart contained went out towards the helpless little mite that belonged to her, and also to its funny companion ; for the Royal Wizard, though good-looking for a man, had not shrunk into a very handsome baby, for no hair came to cover his bald head, and he still had a small whisker on either side of his chubby cheeks.

And matters continued thus for nearly two years, when the little fairy-man with the green suit and the bright eyes again drew near the road where the royal

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laundry stood. This time he was singing gaily to himself, for his errand had been successfully accomplished, and he rejoiced to think how soon he would be back in his beloved Fairy-land. He had had several strange adventures on his journey, and so many things had happened to him while he had been away, that he would never have given a thought to what had previously occurred on the same road had he not met a poor, half-starved looking girl begging for alms by the wayside. It was Dolly, the laundry maid, but how changed she was! After the terrible spell she had brought upon the laundry, she had been driven away and forced to seek work elsewhere; but since her hands, once large and capable, had shrunk to the size of those belonging to a tiny babe, she had been able to do nothing, and was now dependent upon the charity and goodwill of the villagers for her daily bread.

The little fairy-man stopped and looked at her, and as he did so his eyes became brighter than ever.

"Why, I remember your face," he exclaimed; "but you do not look very happy. What is the matter?"

"I am out of work," the girl told him. "I can get nothing to do, so I am obliged to beg."

The fairy-man hastily undid his wallet and produced some silver pieces, for though he had quite forgotten

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all that had happened, he felt sorry for the girl and wanted to help her.

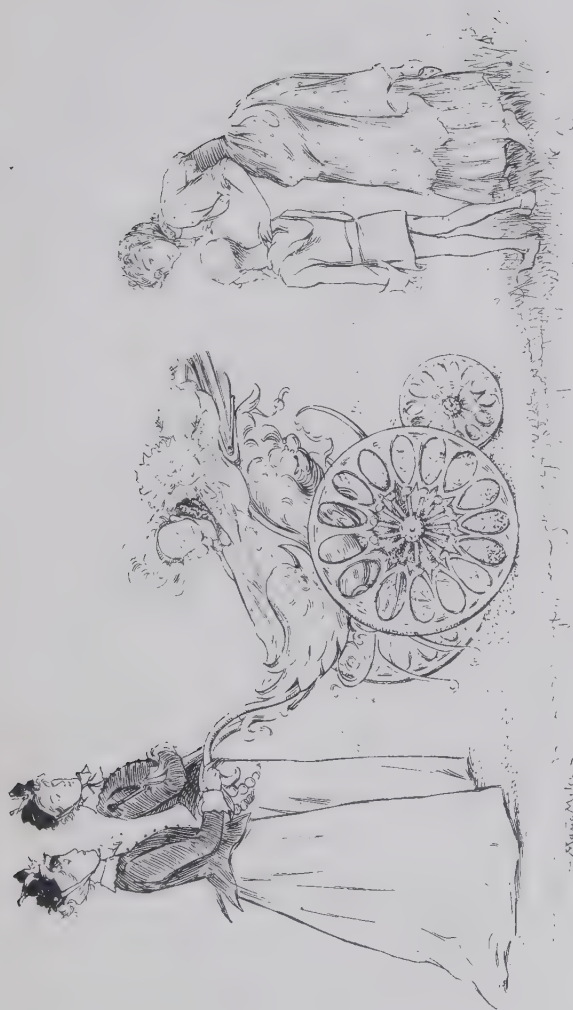
“Hold out your hands,” he commanded, “and I will give you something. Why do you keep them behind you?”

“I dare not show them,” said the poor maid, beginning to weep as she spoke. “They are the hands of a little baby, and quite useless to me, as I can hold nothing with them, nor can I use them for work. Oh, do not you think we have been under this spell long enough? Will you not release us now?”

And into the ears of the astonished fairy-man Dolly poured forth the entire story of his previous visit, her rudeness to him, his just resentment of such treatment, and the terrible spell he cast over the laundry in his wrath. As they talked together they walked along the road until they reached the royal laundry, now disused and neglected, and there on its doorstep Dolly begged his pardon, and entreated him to restore everything to its proper shape and size.

The fairy-man remembered the whole incident now, and feeling the punishment he had inflicted was somewhat in excess of the girl's fault, he swiftly removed the spell from the copper, and as Dolly's hands returned to their normal size he was delighted to see her smile again.

“And now I must be going,” he said at last. “You have had your lesson, which I know you will profit by. You must not play any more rude jokes on passers-by ;



HE HASTENED TOWARDS THE PERAMBULATOR.

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while I, on my side, will refrain from meting out such severe vengeance again. So farewell."

But Dolly seized him by the arm and held him fast. "No," she cried; "you cannot go yet, for you have not finished your share of the work. There are others still suffering from the spell. It is no good unless you restore us all. See yonder."

The little fairy-man, gazing in the direction in which she pointed, gave a great start: for down the road came a large perambulator containing the tiny form of the royal Princess, seated, as usual, by the side of her odd-looking companion, who was turning his quaint little face from side to side with keen curiosity.

"Did I cause that, too? Bless my heart, I wonder what else I did?" asked the fairy-man as, without saying anything to the laundry maid, he hastened towards the perambulator, muttering the incantation to break the charm as he did so; then the utmost confusion began, for directly the spell was removed the Royal Princess and the Wizard commenced to grow, and so swiftly did the change take place that they could not be extricated from the perambulator quickly enough. Her Royal Highness's screams and the Wizard's grumbles filled the air until, with a tremendous jerk, the laundry maid was able to pull the wise man out of the perambulator and set him on his feet. As she did so, she gave his pelisse and skirts a few pats to prevent them getting crumpled, and then

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she bent down and pulled up his little white socks. "There," she said kindly, as she took his feeding bottle from his hands and noticed the astonishment upon his face ; "there, you'll do now ; so run along home and change."

In the meantime the excitement over the restoration of the little Princess was so great that the fairy-man felt he could safely make his escape, but he had not got very far when once again Dolly caused him to stop.

"What is it now?" he said peevishly, for it was getting late, and he was very tired and anxious to reach the end of his journey. "Nothing else can have shrunk so soon? I am sure I restored everything and everybody," he added, thinking what a quaint child the Wizard had made.

"Yes, yes," said the laundry maid gratefully. "You have been most good, but there is still the King's fourth finger. It has shrunk like the other things that went into the copper, and is very tiny."

"Is it, indeed?" said the fairy-man seriously, preparing to hurry off as he spoke. "Well, tell the King, from me, that as he has nine other fingers that have not shrunk he must learn to be——"

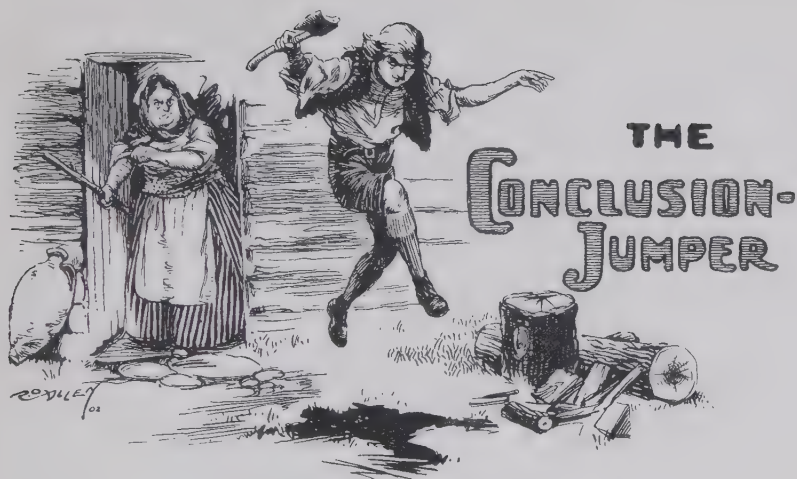
"Yes," said Dolly eagerly. "Learn to be what?"

"Content," cried the little man in green, rushing off before she could stop him.

And after Dolly had watched him running along the

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road, as she looked down at her own hands, now restored to their original size, she gave a happy sigh. "They may not be very beautiful or very white," she said to herself; "but they are useful hands, and do lots of work. I am very glad to have them back. Dear little green fairy-man, I thank you."



MANY years ago in a far distant land there lived a youth whose name was Ikkias. He and his mother dwelt together in a small hut at the foot of the mountains, and though they were really very fond of each other, they spoilt the few pleasures their lives might have contained by continual quarrels, for they were both too quick-tempered and hasty to understand that each possessed good qualities of no slight worth.

One day Ikkias, while busy chopping wood outside the door of his home, stopped his work and gazed wistfully at the tall dark trees growing so proudly up the mountain side. Full of the fire of youth, he looked forward to the time when he would help hew them down and fling

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them into the river, to be carried by the swift torrent to the town beyond the waterfall, where they then would be captured and shipped away to various parts of the country.

But suddenly his meditations were disturbed by the shrill voice of his mother, as she called to him to cease dreaming and be idle no longer.

"You will have to wake up and work now," she cried sharply, "as we must be prepared to face hard times, for I have failed to sell the cow at the fair. The price of bread rises daily, and there is no money in the house ; therefore, unless you want to starve, you must look alive and be busy."

And having spoken thus she went into the hut and slammed the door vigorously.

Directly Ikkias was alone again he began to ponder seriously about the future, but, oddly enough, the more he saw what was his duty, the more a wild desire to jump came to him. He tried to check this feeling, but in vain. His legs bent themselves ready to spring, and, though he sat down upon a log that was waiting to be chopped, he knew he could not resist long. He fixed his thoughts upon the poverty and toil that lay before them both, until, full of good resolutions to prove himself a devoted son, he determined that whatever happened he would always do his best. Unable to remain still he sprang to his feet and leapt high in the air. Once, twice, three times, he bounded up and down, thinking

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as he did so, "I must support my mother now. I will work bravely so that she shall end her days in comfort." But as his feet touched the ground the third time, his face grew pale, for there, close to him, stood his parent, and in one hand she held a thick stick.

"For shame! For shame!" she cried. "To think that when there is not even one crust in the house, or a penny to spend between us, I should find you capering about like an idle goat!"

It was useless for the young fellow to explain that he had only been jumping at the conclusion that he must always strive to protect his mother and keep her in comfort, for she treated this statement merely as an excuse for laziness, and, refusing to believe him, she beat him soundly and turned him out of doors, saying, as he was such a good-for-nothing, she would rather live alone—it would make one mouth less to support.

So, homeless and heartbroken, poor Ikkias set off to wander he knew not whither in search of work. He walked across the snow-clad mountains, begging a night's lodging at any hut he chanced to pass, until at length he reached the summit of a hill, and saw in the distance a large and beautifully built city with a lovely palace standing in the centre of the square. This unexpected sight gave him renewed vigour and encouraged him to proceed; so, forgetful alike of his weariness and despondency, he hurried forward until he stood in one of the main streets. But imagine his

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surprise when he looked round and saw that every shop was closed, every blind drawn down, and not one human being in sight. To all appearance the city was deserted and, except for Ikkias, devoid of inhabitants. But he soon found out to his cost that this was not so, for as he walked quickly forward with his hands in his pockets, cheerily whistling to console himself for lack of companions, he was suddenly overtaken by three old men, who appeared greatly fatigued by their exertions of running. When they reached the young fellow two of them seized his shoulders, while the third clutched at his head, as they all exclaimed breathlessly, "We arrest you, we arrest you. Do not attempt to resist the Royal Guard."

"Very well," sighed Ikkias, feeling that his ill-luck still pursued him, more especially so as the familiar desire to jump again distracted him. For an instant he stood motionless, and then, to the amazement of his captors, he began to spring into the air.

"I suppose you will imprison me," he panted between each bound, but he alighted on his feet several times before the old men were able to grasp him more firmly between them and march him briskly along.

"But won't you tell me what I have done?" he asked.

"You are the Queen's enemy," explained the oldest guard, who was quite bald and toothless. "Therefore we arrest you."

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“Nonsense,” said Ikkias, with a laugh, “the Queen’s enemy, indeed! Why I have never even seen Her Majesty. In fact, I did not know there was a Queen to have an enemy.”

“But you *must* be the Queen’s enemy,” wailed another old man, shaking his white locks helplessly. There is no one else left. We’ve——. Ah, ah, no matter! If you are not the Queen’s enemy, who and what are you?”

“My name is Ikkias,” their prisoner told them. “I am the only son of a poor woodcutter, who lived and died on one of those distant mountains. My mother has turned me out of doors, and my steps led me to this city. I have no work, no money, and no food. I am dead beat and nearly starved to death.”

“And yet you object to being an enemy when we ask you! How unreasonable you are!” cried one of his captors. “Here is the guard-room. Sit between us on this bench and eat this food; perhaps a good meal will make you more sensible. Listen while I explain our meaning. It is so simple, so beautifully simple,” and the old man smiled as he thought of it. “When His Majesty the King died he left one child—a daughter—who was obliged to come to the throne, as she had no brother to reign in her stead. The young Queen had been somewhat indulged in her youth, and was a little—um, um—shall we say headstrong?”

The other old men nodded, and looked about them

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carefully before they committed themselves to such a term, but seeing that, except for their prisoner, they were quite alone, they nervously approved of the observation.

“Headstrong will do,” they assented. “In fact, *very* headstrong, as we are without listeners.”

“But as time went on,” continued the narrator timidly, “life at court became rather—shall we say difficult?”

“Yes,” said the others, “we may say difficult. Difficult will do.”

“And it was admitted by all that Her Majesty was a very trying monarch, and one with whom it was impossible that her subjects should agree. After much anxiety and many unpleasantnesses, it was decided to consult the Wise Man, who resided close to the palace, and see if anything could be done to improve Her Majesty and give her the qualities necessary for a peaceful reign. There was great rejoicing, therefore, when the sage stated that he could, with Her Majesty’s assistance, do all that was required of him, and when her royal assent had been gained, he proceeded to announce that the Queen had an enemy, and until this enemy was subdued, Her Majesty’s temper and general behaviour would leave much to be desired.”

“And who did this extraordinary foe turn out to be?” asked Ikkias, who, now that his hunger was satisfied, was developing a keen interest in the story.

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The three old men groaned loudly. "Ah, if only we knew," they wailed. "But the Queen was so indignant that she ordered the Wise Man to be instantly banished, without allowing him to speak another word. So he was driven out of the town, carrying his secret with him, and leaving us in a worse plight than before."

"How worse?" queried Ikkias. "It seems to me you were about the same."

"Oh, no," they told him. "For when it was too late Her Majesty was stricken with remorse, and issued a proclamation which declared she would not rest till her enemy had been found and banished. Of course, we have often thought we had discovered this mysterious foe, but we cannot have done so, for the Queen remains the same. We have suspected dozens and dozens of people—that is why the town is so empty—but our suspicions have not yet been fixed on the right man."

"But has Her Majesty never thought either of you might be the culprit?" asked Ikkias innocently, though directly he had spoken he saw he had touched upon a very sore topic.

"Not till lately," the oldest guard explained. "But now she does, for the simple reason we are all that are left to suspect. You saw the deserted town as you passed through—the empty houses, the vacant shops—everybody has been banished or they have fled in self-defence. The Queen's enemy must be in the

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town ; yet where ? We are almost the sole remaining inhabitants. We have watched Her Majesty since infancy and sooner than hurt a hair of her pretty, wilful head we would lay down our lives for her. But she was petulant and hasty with us to-day, and vows we mean her evil. Unless we can find the enemy, or even secure a pretence one just to appease her, we may ourselves be unjustly punished."

"So you propose, therefore, to banish me," said Ikkias quietly. "Is that it ?"

"Well, you have nothing else to do, have you ?" they replied. "It cannot hurt you to be banished from a dull place like this, particularly as you have only just arrived. You have not unpacked yet, or anything. Besides, we will make it worth your while, for we are very rich. We will each give you a bag of gold if you will only come with us to the palace and let us tell our story to the Queen without interruptions."

Ikkias sat silently considering this strange suggestion, and as he did so the remembrance of his pale, over-tired mother came to him, and he realised what a difference this promised gold would make to her life. It was true they had parted in anger, but their quarrels were generally caused by the fact that they were both hungry and weary, and he knew if they only possessed a few gold pieces, they would live together as happily as possible. In an instant his mind was made up and he rose to his feet.

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"Give me the money now," he said, "and I will do this thing for you, but remember, the moment I leave the palace it must be on the understanding that I am free to do as I like."

Through the streets the strange little procession went once more. This time Ikkias walked with his head erect and a strong look of determination shining from his eyes, for his great desire was to get this unpleasant interview over and return home, bearing with him wealth which he felt would somewhat hasten the reconciliation he was so anxious to bring about.

When he reached the Palace and passed into the great hall his courage failed him and he hung back. In an instant the guards closed round him. "Your promise," they whispered, "your promise," and forced him on. As they approached Ikkias noticed the silence within the royal walls was being rudely disturbed by the shrill tones of an angry woman, who, from the noise she made, seemed to be accentuating her words of wrath by throwing at the hapless offender any odd but weighty trifles she could lay her hands upon. But presently the torrent of abuse gave way to a sound of uncontrollable weeping, and with a sigh of relief the old men again led the way forward. In an instant Ikkias stood in the royal presence, but how different it was from what he had always imagined it would be! A few scared-looking ladies-in-waiting were grouped behind the throne, at the foot of which lay the neglected

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crown and sceptre, while seated on the throne itself was the young Queen, her eyes red with weeping, her fists clenched, and her face distorted by the passion she could not subdue. Directly she looked up, the three old men dropped on their knees before her, but Ikkias felt determined not to do so. Though she was a queen by birth, he felt as a woman she commanded neither his homage nor his respect, so he remained standing.

“What is this?” she cried furiously. And then seeing the Royal Guard nearly doubled up on the floor, she understood. “Oh, I see,” she went on eagerly, “so you think again you have captured my enemy? Are you sure you have made no mistake now? You have been so unfortunate before.”

“Your Majesty,” gasped the oldest guard, “we are quite correct this time. You need hardly glance at this young man to see he is indeed your bitter and most determined enemy. But if you will not take our word for it, will you not question him yourself?”

The Queen raised her eyes to Ikkias’ face, and he saw, though full of tears at the moment, they could be very, very beautiful and shine with a sweet expression. After she had learnt his name, she looked at him curiously.

“Why are you my enemy?” she said, frowning darkly at the nervous young man.

“I don’t know,” replied Ikkias blankly, feeling a



"WHY ARE YOU MY ENEMY?" SHE SAID.

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mad desire to kick the Royal Guard for not giving him more particulars.

"You don't know! You don't know!" screamed the Queen, clenching her fists with anger. "Then how dare you presume thus? Have I ever seen you before, wronged you by word or deed, or given you cause for this hatred?"

"Oh, your Majesty, I cannot deceive you: I am no enemy of yours. I have been forced into this position unwillingly, but I cannot continue like this, not even to oblige these old men," he added, glaring at them viciously.

Livid with rage, the Queen turned away and strode up and down the room, talking and gesticulating madly as she did so. When the first burst of passion was over she flung herself down upon her throne.

"Listen to me, Ikkias," she said coldly. "The punishment for my supposed enemies has always been banishment, but in your case it shall be worse. This deceit of yours shall be rewarded by death. Unless—and now hearken to me carefully—unless within twenty-four hours you discover my real enemy, you shall be beheaded. No, I will hear no more; you have wilfully tried to deceive me, therefore I will have my revenge. In the darkest dungeon shall you be confined until to-morrow, when once more you shall be brought before me to tell me if you have succeeded. Away with him. My mind is made up, and I can listen to nothing more."

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Bitterly resenting the cruel position in which he had been placed, Ikkias was marched away by his surprised captors, incarcerated in the smallest cell, and then left to his own thoughts ; but though his state of mind was far from being an enviable one, the condition of the young Queen was really worse. Infuriated at the trick that had been played on her, and incapable of looking at the matter in a calm manner, she worked herself up into such a fury that the following day, when the hour arrived for her interview with the young man, she was worn out and exhausted. She sat so long waiting to receive him that at last she realised something must have happened, for the prisoner did not seem forthcoming. Full of wonderment and fear that he might have escaped during the night, she sent to demand the reason of the delay, and then she was told he was being carried as quickly as possible.

“Carried ?” said the Queen. “But why does he not walk ?”

“Alas, your Majesty,” replied one of the ladies-in-waiting, “his captors bid me say he had hurt his head and must needs be supported into your presence, where it is hoped you will allow him to be seated. Here he comes.”

The Royal Guard then appeared, half-leading, half-carrying Ikkias among them, and when he feebly sank down upon the couch, the Queen’s heart became more tender as she saw how he suffered. With her own

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hands she placed a pillow beneath his aching head before she asked for an explanation of the accident. "What have you done to him?" she demanded of his captors.

"Nothing, your Majesty," they answered her. "We acted upon your commands and shut him into the lowest and darkest dungeon, and when we went to fetch him out this morning, we found him lying with this damaged skull."

"It is but a slight injury, your Majesty," said Ikkias, "for which I alone am responsible. It was only my luck following me, though indeed I need not grumble since it has helped to solve the problem that troubled me so greatly. I was pondering in my cell upon the wretched motive that had made me a prisoner, when suddenly everything became clear to me, and I jumped at the conclusion I had long been thinking about, and in so doing I hit my head upon the ceiling and knew no more."

"Did you arrive at this mysterious conclusion?" asked the Queen curiously. "If so, I am anxious to learn what it was."

"Indeed, yes," replied Ikkias. "This wound upon my head is less than nothing to me, for I know now who is your enemy. Your Majesty, do you give me leave to speak?"

She nodded gently, and stood listening by his side.

"You are your own enemy," he said gravely. "You

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who are so young and so beautiful could have no other. By your uncontrollable fits of passionate jealousy, your angry temper, and your hasty, ungovernable feelings, you are making your subjects shrink away from you in dread, while if you would only put a curb upon yourself sometimes, there is no one who would not lay down his life to cause you a moment's joy. Your position as monarch here makes you entitled to respect, but though you are a Queen, you are above all things a woman, and one who, by her great virtues and goodness, should be able to command the admiration and love of everybody. Forgive me for my plain speaking. It is for your sake I do it."

Fearing an outburst of wrath every minute, Ikkias nervously watched the beautiful lady as she paced slowly up and down the room. But as she remained lost in thought, her face became calmer, and, at last, when she looked at him, there was a tender light in her eye.

"You are right, Ikkias," she confessed. "I see my faults quite clearly now, and I should like to thank you for your kindly words of wisdom, and to tell you I am determined to be no longer my own enemy. But I will not weary you with further talk now, for you look too pale and tired to listen to my resolves. It is not fit, however, that I should let you leave the palace until the cut on your head has properly healed. So I will send an escort to bring your mother here, and in the

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meantime you must remain beneath this roof as my most honoured guest. Mine shall be the hand to minister to your needs, mine the voice to soothe you when you are in pain, mine the presence to help you while away many hours of loneliness. Ikkias, will you be content to stay?"

In a few days Ikkias became quite restored to health and able to most thoroughly enjoy the happy hours he spent with the young Queen. But soon the old restless feeling came to him, and one day, as he sat by her side beneath the verandah, he sprang to his feet and began to jump. In astonishment Her Majesty gazed upon him, and then seeing he was in danger of doing himself some fresh harm, she hurried forward and laid one hand on his arm.

"What is the matter?" she said tenderly. "Are you jumping at a conclusion again? Be careful lest you do yourself an injury."

"Your Majesty," he cried almost breathless, "I must leave you at once. I feel I am not entitled to further enjoy the hospitality of your palace. I am not worthy to remain beneath this roof."

She pouted prettily, and looked at him from under her long lashes.

"Is that the conclusion you have just arrived at?" she said wistfully. "It was not worth so much exertion, surely, on so hot a day."

"No, your Majesty, the real one is that I love you,

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but I nevertheless dare not ask you to be my wife. I have neither rank nor riches to offer you, nothing but my life's devotion, and that counts for so little. Therefore it is right that I should go."

She held out her hands entreatingly. "Ikkias, do not leave me," she faltered. "I cannot spare you from my side now."

He tried to catch a peep at her downcast face, but she would not meet his eyes.

"Do you—do you care for me, too?" he asked, hardly able to believe his good fortune.

She nodded her head, and then flung her arms about his neck.

"Yes, I do," she whispered, and then she gave a little laugh. "I am not gifted like you are, dear one," she said saucily, "but, nevertheless, I jumped at that conclusion long ago."



IN the centre of the forest, though almost concealed by the many deep shadows that the tall trees cast, there was situated, once upon a time, a small surgery belonging to Picatoo, the fairies' dentist.

Until recent years Fairyland could offer no employment to Picatoo in the profession he had adopted, but lately the inhabitants had grown so fond of cracking nuts with their pretty white teeth that this little person had rapidly become the most celebrated and important character throughout the kingdom.

Never a day passed but several fairies came to the surgery door with a piteous tale of misfortune, and implored his aid. Sometimes they

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were lucky enough to only chip off a very wee piece of tooth ; then Picatoo would lecture them severely and, after exhibiting many terrible instruments, which he threatened to use should they persist in their foolishness, he would send them home rejoicing to think they had not been hurt, and convinced the dentist was exceedingly clever because he caused them no pain. But when the damage was bad—I mean if the tooth was broken right away, and Picatoo saw nothing could be done, he would gravely shake his head and dismiss the patient, who, for the future, would be teased by her companions on account of the ugly gap she showed when she laughed. Fairies who were vain of their personal appearance would, after such an accident, endeavour to smile no more, but so many pranks are played by these happy little people that often it is impossible not to be amused at them.

But at last the Elf King, who was a very observant monarch, grew weary of seeing his subjects thus disfigured, so he determined to know the reason of it. Therefore he inquired into the matter, and when he had learnt what had caused the blemishes, he sent for his daughter, for he had decided to speak to her in case she should desire to act in the same foolish manner.

Now the Princess Moksah's mouth contained the most lovely set of pearly white teeth that had ever been known. "As white as the Princess's tooth" was an expression often used to note purity and perfection ;

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and when, in answer to her father's summons, the maiden entered the room, his Majesty rejoiced to think that it was not too late to lay his command upon her.

"My dearest child," he said, as he greeted her, "I am greatly distressed to notice that, for many reasons, some of my people are losing their teeth, and this causes such an alteration in their hitherto charming faces, that I can hardly gaze upon them without shuddering. Picatoo the dentist tells me they ruin their teeth by using them to crack nuts with—a most unnecessary proceeding, by-the-bye, when the hardest shell can easily be crushed between two stones or the hall door. I am as powerless to remove the nuts from the forest as I am to instil wisdom into the heads of my fairies, especially those of the younger generation; but I must beg you to promise me, beloved Moksah, that never will you attempt to do such an unwise thing with your beautiful teeth. Remember how particular the Prince Hurlbut is about your personal appearance, and any damage to your beauty would be a sufficient excuse for him to break off the engagement."

When the Princess heard this she pouted angrily, and seemed to be in no hurry to do as the King desired.

"Father," she objected, "I love nuts, especially when I break their shells myself. I hate crackers. I

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never, never, *never* use them, nor do I intend to do so now. If the Prince Hurlbut refuses to marry me, there are other princes who are single and who will do equally well. Fairyland is overrun with eligible princes, kings, or dukes. I know several who would make delightful husbands."

His Majesty, however, would listen to no further argument, but insisted upon his daughter giving him the required promise, and when she had done so he went away feeling considerably relieved in his mind.

Now Picatoo the dentist had, for many months, been wildly in love with a dainty little fairy who lived on the north side of the forest, not very far from the river bed. They were unable to meet frequently, for he was so much occupied in his surgery that he could not often spare the time to journey such a distance to see his sweetheart. However, one fine afternoon, he decided to take a holiday, and before he set out to enjoy himself he arranged with Coofee, a monstrosly incompetent assistant, who was generally employed to open the door and sweep out the surgery, to remain in case any patients should arrive.

Coofee was delighted to be in sole authority, and for a long while he amused himself by inspecting the many instruments Picatoo possessed; then he began to play with the drill and make nasty scratches upon the back of the chair. Whilst he was busily turning it with his foot, he heard a knock upon the outer door,

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and as he paused to listen it was loudly repeated, but this time it was followed by a plaintive little cry of "Oh, do let me in ! Please let me in !"

"The Princess Moksah !" gasped Coofee, rushing to the door, which he threw open as he invited her to enter.

"I want to speak with Picatoo immediately," said her Royal Highness. "I am in great pain, and I must see him."

Then Coofee abased himself in a grovelling manner before he spoke.

"Picatoo is out just now," he said, inwardly rejoicing at his own good luck, for he knew if he could lessen the Princess's suffering, his fortune would be made. "But I am a very skilled dentist myself," he added untruthfully.

Moksah gave a sigh of satisfaction, and then she confessed her misdoing. "I was cracking a nut to-day—such a silly hard shell it had—and just when I was trying my best to break it something went *pop* in my mouth and out fell a little piece of tooth. So I came here, and now, please, put it right at once, for I shall be missed if I am away from the palace very long."

But Coofee, who was too proud of his temporary power to admit his complete ignorance of dentistry, could only suggest that the rest of the tooth should be extracted ; that being the only method, he artfully

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remarked, by which the accident could be concealed from the King and her future husband, the Prince Hurlbut.

So the Princess sat in the dreadful chair and bravely put her head back, then she shut her eyes closely, opened her mouth wide, and waited. Coofee began to pull. One, two, three, but the tooth never moved. Once more ; one, two, three, and this time the result was better. Suddenly out came the tooth, and Coofee, who was quite unprepared for such success, fell down from sheer surprise, hitting his head against the floor. When he remembered what had occurred, he scrambled to his feet again ; but it was only to discover that the Princess had vanished, after thoughtfully leaving her fee behind.

Later in the afternoon Picatoo returned, radiant and contented, from his visit ; but Coofee, feeling a little dubious about what had passed, forbore to mention the Princess's visit, and stealthily buried the tiny white tooth beneath some moss at the foot of a tree.

Early the next day there was great excitement in the forest. The bluebells and lilies nodded their heads mysteriously at each other, the trees swayed to and fro while they whispered among themselves, and even the rabbits forgot their natural shyness sufficiently to meet in an open space and discuss the terrible information they had received ; they were much too absorbed in their gossip to remember that they were liable to be shot

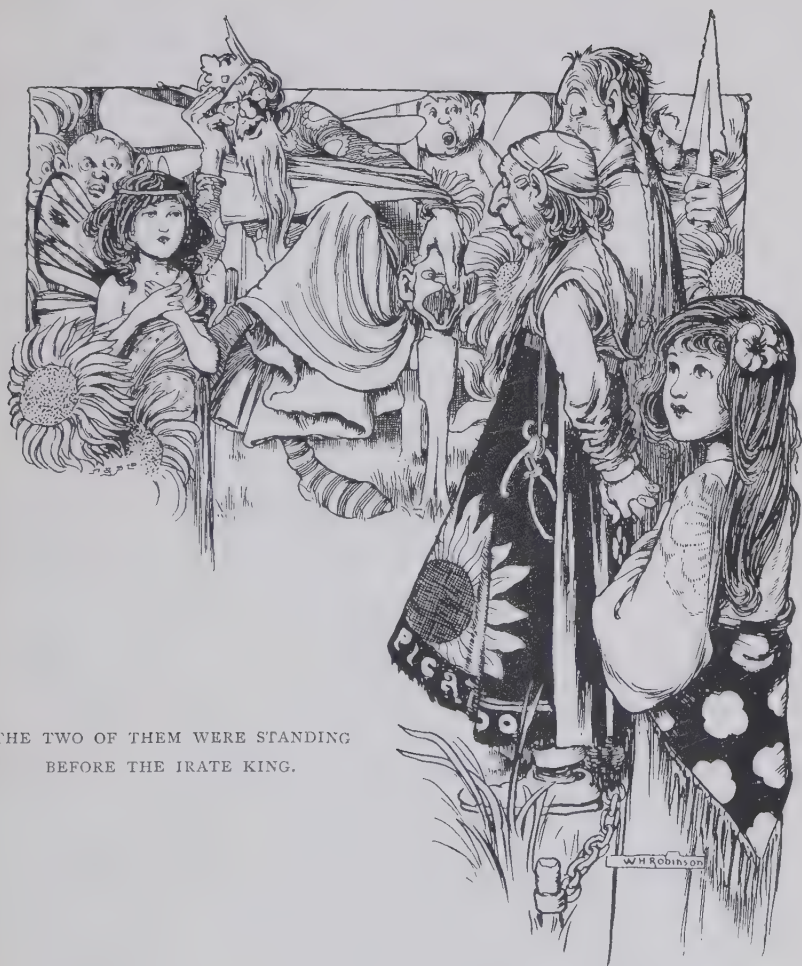
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at any moment. Although the little dentist had no patients that morning, he had an influx of visitors, for everybody was eager to be first with such wonderful news. Not knowing what had occurred the previous day, Picatoo was filled with amazement when he learnt that Prince Hurlbut had broken off his engagement with the Princess Moksah, and now refused to marry her upon any consideration whatever.

But before he had time to really appreciate the fearful calamity that had befallen the Royal Family he was startled to see the King's guard march up to surround the door of the surgery and then read a warrant for the arrest of himself and his assistant.

In a very few minutes they were being hurried towards the Court of Fairy Justice, where the trial was to take place. As they paced along, side by side, Coofee, with many bitter tears of repentance, narrated the circumstances under which he had been forced to draw the Princess's tooth, confessing, at the same time, that he never admitted how ignorant he was. Picatoo sighed as he listened to the story, for he realised now why they were prisoners, and he knew they would both receive a heavy punishment ; he, because he had shamefully deserted his post of duty, and Coofee, on account of deceiving and ultimately damaging the beautiful Princess.

Soon the two of them were standing before the irate King. Fetters of such thickness clasped their wrists



THE TWO OF THEM WERE STANDING
BEFORE THE IRATE KING.

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and ankles that their weight alone made escape impossible, while the captives were too upset by the enormity of their offence to dare to raise their eyes ; they knew, if they did so, they would see the unhappy face of Moksah, perhaps, too, catch a glimpse of the little gap in her mouth which was causing all this trouble.

After a painful silence, during which Coofee twitched his lips nervously, his Majesty commenced to speak.

"Picatoo," he said, gazing sternly at the unhappy little fairy, "Picatoo, for some time the trusted dentist to the Crown, what have you to say in defence of the dreadful act that has been committed upon the Princess, and for which, we are told, you are entirely responsible?"

Then Picatoo shivered with terror and crept forward to pray for mercy. "I can only confess," he humbly declared, "that I neglected my work yesterday afternoon, being fully aware when I did so that I was leaving a most incompetent fellow to fill my place ; but I never for an instant thought he would be bold enough to extract one of her Royal Highness's teeth."

"Do you know, oh, careless dentist," continued the King, "that owing to the way in which my daughter has been damaged, the wealthy Prince Hurlbut now refuses to take her for his wife ? He says he cannot wed a disfigured maid. And for this it is only proper that you and your assistant should be punished."

"I am willing to suffer," said Picatoo in a tone of

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resignation, "and I will undertake to see," he added viciously, "that the base villain Coofee shall participate to the fullest extent in whatever sentence you pronounce."

"That is well," said the King approvingly. "This is your punishment. Though simple, it is not generally liked, and when it is concluded it must be followed by banishment. Every day at three o'clock, you and Coofee, in the presence of the gaoler, shall each extract one of your own teeth, and this you will both continue to do until there are no more left in your jaws."

A smile of satisfaction wreathed around Picatoo's face as he listened to the King's decree, for he was almost toothless already, through practising upon himself with his own instruments ; but poor Coofee, who unfortunately possessed a complete set of teeth, of which he was very proud, cried aloud in horror.

But his Majesty would not listen.

"It is too late," he said ; "you must bear the consequences of your sin. I have nothing more to say, nor can I listen to further arguments upon the matter."

Then a sudden inspiration came to Coofee, and, with a sound of hope in his voice, he commenced to expound the following theory.

"Oh, most gracious King," he cried, "we are not wholly to blame in this matter, for had the Princess faithfully and truly kept her promise to you, and refrained from cracking these nuts, we should never have

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had an opportunity for such wrong-doing. Besides, I acted under compulsion. It is high treason to refuse to obey any member of the Royal Family."

At these words his Majesty became thoughtful, for he realised that Coofee spoke truly, and that all this trouble had been brought about through the disobedience of his daughter, whom he had always trusted ; and though she had, by the breaking off of her engagement, been most severely punished, he still felt very angry with her.

These indignant reflections were interrupted by Moksah herself, who rose from her seat by the throne, and, kneeling before her father, humbly entreated him for a hearing.


"For my sake, father, I beg you to mitigate the cruel sentence you have just pronounced. I alone am to blame in this matter, for I broke my promise to you, and, in strict defiance of your wishes, used to crack nuts whenever I could. Picatoo was wrong to leave his surgery so long while in search of his own pleasure, and Coofee erred in claiming knowledge which, in reality, he did not possess. But their faults are as nothing in comparison to mine. So, father dear, do not make my sorrow greater by refusing to grant this request."

So the King, feeling that Picatoo and Coofee had already received a warning which they would never be likely to forget, consented to do as his daughter wished, and therefore he reluctantly dismissed the fairies

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from his Court. Hardly able to realise that they were saved, the two little people departed in great glee ; while the Princess, her pride subdued on account of the ugly gap in her mouth, lived to be a comfort and solace to his Majesty, and ultimately became the Elf Queen, in which capacity she still reigns in prosperity and happiness, beloved by her subjects on account of the tenderness she displays towards the plain and afflicted.

THE PANGWANGDA AND THE HOOHI

HE preparations to celebrate the birthday of the Princess Kada were most elaborate and costly. Garlands of flowers and flags of gorgeous hue decorated the streets, while the people, attired in their best clothes, stood watching for the royal procession to pass. But it became so late that the crowd at length, fearing an accident, with one accord moved towards the Palace. Portions of the procession filled the courtyard, the royal musicians, dressed in a most superb uniform, stood ready at the door, but still the delay continued, until the terrible truth became known, and the people sadly and quietly went back to their homes.

The Pangwangda and the Hoohi

Princess Kada had vanished !

In vain search was made for her throughout the Palace and the beautiful grounds surrounding it, until, at last, the King, her uncle, sank upon his throne and began to weep aloud.

“I am glad the Queen is dead,” he wailed. “She could not have borne this grief.”

“But, your Majesty,” said the Lord Chamberlain suspiciously, “have you no idea what has happened to your niece ?”

“None,” said the wicked King. “I know no more than any of you.”

“She must have been stolen,” mused the Lord Chamberlain. “Perhaps some robbers, hoping to gain a reward, have kidnapped her.”

“I have it !” excitedly cried one of the nobles. “It is the Pangwangda who has done this base deed. He has robbed us of our Princess !”

“The Pangwangda ?” echoed the Lord Chamberlain. “Alas ! Then we shall never see her Royal Highness again unless we instantly give chase, follow him to his home, and demand that she shall be given up.”

“But she will be dead then,” objected the King, not liking the turn the affair had taken. “And quite useless, therefore, for all practical purposes.”

The Lord Chamberlain shook his head.

“Pardon me, your Majesty,” he said. “She will be

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alive, I know ; for the Pangwangda never dines off those of royal blood."

"If you really think she is there I will see about fetching her back to-morrow," said the King soothingly, though he was inwardly raging, for he felt it hard that after scheming to get rid of her Royal Highness, the Court should desire to find her again.

"To-morrow ?" exclaimed the Prince Bekundi, who had been listening attentively. This young prince had come specially to ride in the birthday procession of the Princess Kada, for he was so charmed by her beauty that he was determined to make her his wife. Therefore the casual tone of his future uncle irritated him exceedingly: "To-morrow may be too late. What will happen to her meantime ?"

"Nothing, I assure you," said his Majesty. "The Pangwangda is most considerate to his captives ; as long as they keep his cave tidy, that is all he asks. And really, between you and me, a little work will do my niece no harm. She is often very idle. It will be the making of the dear girl, I am sure."

"Traitor !" screamed Prince Bekundi. And then, drawing his sword with an air of determination which vastly became him, he rushed out of the Palace, full of his quest.

But the cold air quickly cooled his ardour, while his ignorance of the country was so great that he did not

The Pangwangda and the Hoochi

know which way to turn, until suddenly his eye rested upon a sign which modestly swung before a little cottage.

“To any in distress
I will supply redress.”

“That’s the place for me,” thought Bekundi, knocking loudly at the door, until he was told to enter.

When his eyes grew accustomed to the subdued light he saw an old woman crouching over the dying embers on the hearth.

“What do you want with me?” she said sharply, and then, seeing the troubled look in his eyes, she spoke again. “Sit where I can see you, and tell me all about it,” she said.

So Prince Bekundi told the old woman of his love for the Princess Kada, her sudden disappearance, and her uncle’s callous indifference to her fate. “They tell me she has been stolen by the Pangwangda,” he added, “and I shall never rest again until I hold her in my arms and call her mine.”

“I will help you,” said the wise woman; “for I dislike the King, and am always glad to thwart him. You must know that if you wed the Princess, his Majesty has to give her a large sum of money, while if the Pangwangda keeps her for one week he is entitled to claim her for ever.”

“A week!” echoed the Prince. “Only a week to find her in, and already I have lost one hour.”

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"Hush!" said the old woman, "and listen to me. The home of the Pangwangda is in the deep valley which lies at the foot of the Great Green Hill."

"The Great Green Hill which casts a dark shadow over the town?" queried the Prince.

"Yes," was the reply. "But the sides of the valley are so steep that only one animal can lead you to the bottom in safety. You must ask the Hoohi to conduct you thither. He hates the Pangwangda, so he will be of great assistance in the quest. His home is near the big cave on the sea-shore. You must walk there at low tide. Go now, the sea is running out splendidly for your purpose. I can see through this little window how the sun shines upon the wet sand."

For an instant the Prince faltered. "It is quicksand on yonder spot," he said. "It will bear no man's weight."

But the old woman would not heed. "If you really love the Princess you will give all, even your life, to release her. If you love her not, do not waste my time."

"I do love her," exclaimed Bekundi, "and I will dare everything for her sake."

"Good," said the wise woman approvingly. "When you find the Hoohi, show him this white flower, and all will be well."

So the Prince left her little cottage, and ran swiftly towards the sea-shore, but when he drew near the wet

The Pangwangda and the Hoohi

sand he faltered and looked back wistfully. He knew his home lay behind him—his home which sheltered the parents he loved, but the thought of his mother gave him the necessary courage. Her only son should never earn the title of coward. With a cheer he bounded forward on to the treacherous sand, and, clasping the white flower in his hand, he let himself sink down unresistingly. Swiftly the sand crept over his body, it filled up the crevices in his boots, it slipped into all his pockets, and soon he could feel it getting down the back of his collar before it reached his ears. In a few seconds he had completely vanished, and just as he felt he was choking, he seemed to slip right through the sand, and found himself in a vast hall, which, however, was completely empty, except for yards and yards and yards of what appeared to be indiarubber tubing.

“How very odd,” said the Prince. “I suppose I may rest upon it while I shake the sand out of my boots.” But directly he sat down he was thrown violently off, and an infuriated voice addressed him in terms of great wrath.

“I am sorry,” said Bekundi politely. “The owner of the voice does not appear to be here, otherwise he would see from my face how very sorry I am.”

“Not here ! I am very much here, as you ought to know, considering you have been sitting upon me,” was the indignant reply. “The Hoohi not here, indeed !”

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"Oh, are you the Hoohi?" exclaimed the Prince, gazing with astonishment at the tremendous length of rubber tubing before him. "I did not know that *that* was alive."

"Well, you do now," retorted the Hoohi. "But why you are here at all I can't make out."

"I have come to show you something," said the Prince. "If you will just tell me where your head is I should be so grateful."

"My head is in the middle of my body," was the reply. "All ordinary people have it at one end, but the middle is far more uncommon. Here is my tail," he went on, raising it as he spoke. "Now follow up from my tail and be careful you do not tread on me. And do not kick my face, or there will be trouble."

So the Prince ran swiftly along the rows of Hoohi that lay stretched out before him until, just as he was becoming exhausted, he saw two little eyes gleaming.

"What an age you have been!" grumbled the animal. "One would think I was a maze or a Chinese puzzle."

"Oh, never mind," said the Prince, "I will be quicker next time. I have come to show you this," he added, producing the little white flower. The effect was wonderful. Thrill after thrill passed along the Hoohi's body as he slowly arched his head and gazed at Bekundi.

"Good!" he cried. "That means the wise woman has kept her promise and given me a chance of an-



"I have come to show you this," he said, producing the little white flower.

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noying the Pangwangda. What has he been doing, I wonder?"

When he heard about the Princess the King had tried to get rid of, he was delighted. "We will regain her," he declared, "and she will be none the worse for her adventure. But what happens to her then?" he added sharply. "Her wicked uncle will soon dispose of her some other way."

"Well, then," began the Prince shyly, "then—then—well, then——"

"Then what?" said the Hoohi impatiently.

"I thought of marrying her," admitted his Royal Highness; "for I love her dearly."

"That's all right," agreed the animal. "Now we have only to settle one more item before we start, and that is my food for the expedition. I only eat gold," he explained. "Gold in any form, and I want a great deal of feeding."

"I will give you gold," promised the young fellow, knowing his purse was full. "So let us start."

"Come along, then," ordered the Hoohi. "Now sit firmly on me and hold on to this ear while we move out of the sand."

Slowly this long animal began to vanish, and after watching carefully, the Prince realised that one end of its body must have been on dry land, and, therefore, able to pull the rest of it up. When the last coil lay on the grass the Hoohi gave a sigh.

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"Gold," he muttered. "I am hungry."

So Prince Bekundi shook out several coins, which instantly vanished, and then, having replaced his purse, he suggested that they should start again.

"Start!" said the Hoohi, in great disdain. "Why, one end of me started long ago. That is why my head is in the middle. Such a lot can be done before I am disturbed. Now sit on me, and off we go. The bit in advance has reached the Great Green Hill, so we had better get there, too."

And away they went, sliding and gliding over the fields and hedges at a tremendous pace, until suddenly the Hoohi paused and opened his great mouth in a most meaning way.

"I have not much money left," said the Prince anxiously. "You had such a large sum before. Is this enough?" And he shook the contents of his purse on to the grass.

"I am afraid it isn't," said the Hoohi candidly. "But, tell me, would you give me more if you had it?"

"Indeed I would," said Bekundi earnestly. "And I have great riches, but alas! not here."

"Never mind," replied his odd companion. "I have a splendid idea, and we will carry it out, as I know you are a man of honour and can be trusted. Write on a piece of paper what you would give me if it were here, and I will swallow that, on the understanding, of

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course, that whatever is written on the paper ultimately belongs to me."

So the Prince wrote, "*My Jewels*," and popped it into the Hoohi's jaws, and then this extraordinary creature slowly twisted one end of itself round a solitary tree that stood near, while the other end began to disappear towards the valley. "Another mouthful," begged the Hoohi, "and then I will explain my plans to you."

"*My Horses*," wrote the young fellow, with great reluctance, for he loved his steeds, and was loth to part with them.

"Sit on me again and hold my ear," said the Hoohi. "My head will go a long way down this steep side of the valley, but when it stops you must slide down the rest of me until you reach the home of the Pangwangda and there fight for the Princess. When you have got her I will see that you reach the summit of this hill safely, that is," he added meaningly, "if I am fed properly."

"Do not let us delay," begged Bekundi, laying a bit of paper with "*My Ships*" written upon it in front of the Hoohi, who, after enjoying his meal, started down the hillside.

When the Prince stood alone at the base of the hill, he began to tremble violently and nearly cried with fear. There lay the sleeping Pangwangda, but no sign of the damsel could he see. He felt very desolate and

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lonely, and as he glanced at the long bit of Hoohi dangling down the side he wondered what would happen. But suddenly the Princess walked out of the cave, and the sight of her distress made the young man very brave.

"Dear Bekundi," she screamed, "take me away from this horrid place, I beg. I am so miserable."

"I will," the Prince answered. "That is why I am here. But how shall I begin? Shall I kill the Pangwangda, do you think?"

"No," said the Princess shuddering. "That won't do at all. Besides, what's the good? See, the Pangwangda wakes. It is too late now."

The Prince bowed very low when he knew the creature saw him, and then he advanced.

"I demand the release of her Royal Highness the Princess Kada," he said defiantly. "And I will have it, too," he added.

"Have you really come for the Princess?" said the Pangwangda. "My dear sir, I am delighted. Take her at once. She has plagued me unceasingly. The girl is a perfect nuisance."

"Oh—h!" cried the royal damsel, furious at such an insult. "Oh, how dare you?"

"I never wanted to steal her," went on the Pangwangda, "though I can well understand the King wishing to get rid of her. Little worry! How do you intend to escape?"

The Pangwangda and the Hoohi

"Well," said the astonished Prince, looking apologetically at the Hoohi dangling behind him. "I thought—at least, I was advised—oh, I don't know!" he cried, breaking down hopelessly. "It has all turned out so different from what I expected, I can't think."

The Pangwangda got upon his one leg and hopped forward curiously.

"Oh, I see," he said. "That's a bit of the Hoohi. I thought it was rope. He is a very useful animal, isn't he? But I forgot. If you attempt to take the Princess, I *must* fight you, and that will be your death," he said, looking at his one tiny foot with pride. "Her uncle pays me to guard her; so if I'm awake, I must, mustn't I?"

"Of course you must," agreed Bekundi, laying his hand on the hilt of his sword.

"Wait a minute," screamed the other, hopping away. "If only I had been asleep you could have escaped splendidly, and there would have been no scene. I suppose," he went on wistfully, "you could not wait until I dozed again, could you?"

"Certainly I will," said the Prince. "You settle down for a nap, and we shall be gone before you wake. It's a splendid notion. Go to sleep at once, for the sooner we are home again, the better."

The Prince and Princess sat quietly conversing while the Pangwangda composed himself for slumber, and the more the young people remained together the more

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interested did they become, until it was with a feeling of regret they realised the Pangwangda was snoring.

"We must be off," said the Prince, twining the end of the Hoohi round the royal maiden, and then, holding on to it himself, waited until they were drawn out of the valley.

"You are very kind, Hoohi dear," said Kada, laying her hand affectionately upon the body of the animal. But the Hoohi only gasped and shook his head weakly, until catching the Prince's eye, he made a sign to him, which Bekundi responded to by flinging himself on his knees by the creature's head and whispering into his odd-shaped ear.

"I have nothing left to feed you with," he cried.

"Nothing?" said the Hoohi dubiously. "Nothing?"

"Well, only one thing," replied the young fellow. "And if you eat that I can never ask her Royal Highness to wed me. I shall be a homeless pauper."

"Unless I am properly fed," replied the famished Hoohi, "Princess Kada shall not get back, for I will keep her in my lair beneath the quicksand. Have you forgotten our contract? Do you fear to give your all to win safety for the damsel you love? Shame!"

This reproach so maddened Bekundi that, after writing swiftly upon a piece of paper, he crammed it into the creature's mouth.

"What have you given me?" asked the Hoohi, as he gulped it down.



They sat quietly conversing,

The Pangwangda and the Hoohi

"My palace," replied the Prince simply. "All I have left in the world. And now take the Princess home safely. No, I will not come too. What right have I, a beggar, to ride by her side? I will rest here awhile, and then go forth into the world and carve my way to fame and fortune. Farewell!"

As the Prince turned away, he heard a sob from her Royal Highness, but he would not heed it; and flinging himself upon a fallen tree stump, he began to ponder upon his future. In the distance he heard wild shouts and cheers, which he thought must be the populace welcoming the return of their young Princess, until a strange rustling sound startled him, and, on looking up, he saw the royal maiden advancing towards him.

"Oh, Prince," she cried, stretching out her hands, "I told the Hoohi to bring me back to you. My wicked uncle the King has fled, and the people have made me Queen."

"I congratulate you, your Majesty," said Bekundi earnestly. "May your reign be one of prosperity and happiness."

"I do not want to rule alone," she said, looking at him wistfully. "You used to care for me, Prince. In what have I offended you?"

"I do love you," he cried, drawing nearer as he spoke. "But I am homeless and penniless now. I have not even a hut to offer my wife did I dare seek one."

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“ But I have all,” she cried ; “ and I long to share my possessions with you. You gave everything you valued to rescue me. Your fortune, jewels, horses, ships, and beautiful palace. I know it is a poor bargain, but will you not—will you not——”

“ What ? ” said the Prince. “ Will I not what ? ”

“ Accept me in exchange ? ” she murmured, hiding her blushing face within his arms.

And the Prince Bekundi promised he would.

THE STORY OF THE APPLES

FAR along the lane was situated a small cottage, with a garden in front and a field at the back, which should have been an orchard had the occupants of the place sufficient means and energy to stock it with fruit trees. But the waste and thriftlessness of the couple made this impossible; indeed, if it had not been for the regular sum of money paid them by their lodger, the amount necessary for their own rent would not often have been forthcoming.



One day, however, the man who lived in the cottage returned from his work so late that his

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wife, always an ill-tempered woman, rushed out to demand where he had been.

"I thought you had fallen into the hands of thieves, perhaps," she said sharply, "though, after all, I might have known *you* were not worth robbing."

"Easy—easy now," her husband replied. "In a short while I have reason to believe matters will be so greatly changed for us that my pockets may be full of gold."

"Why do you talk such nonsense?" she asked him. "Have you come into a fortune, or are you going to work harder than you do now to support your wife and children?"

"Neither," he told her. "But I have been tidying up the garden for our neighbour down the lane, and he has promised to give me a cutting from one of his apple trees, so that we may carefully plant it, and thus, by commencing our orchard, lay the foundation for a substantial fortune."

"That is glorious," exclaimed the woman, "though how, my husband, you fancy a fortune can be obtained from the crop of one apple tree puzzles me. Is it golden fruit, forsooth, you would grow?"

"Nay, nay. We will begin by planting this cutting in such a good position that, in a short time, it will thrive well enough to allow us to take more cuttings from it, so that soon, instead of one tree, we shall possess thirty."

The Story of the Apples

“Yes,” cried the wife, clapping her hands with delight; “and each of these trees will bear a large crop of apples, which will fetch good money in the market-place. Of course, too, we must have a donkey cart to carry the fruit to the town. How dearly I shall enjoy the drive there every week, for, when I have sold off all the fruit, I shall be able to walk from stall to stall in the market, buying from each merchant all that I fancy. What pretty clothes I shall be able to purchase for myself, while for you, my dear husband, there will be warm coats to get and thick boots for the winter. Never will I return empty-handed. And all this good fortune will be owing to the generosity of our neighbour in giving us the cutting from one of his trees, though really, why he did not do it long ago I cannot understand.”

“Gently, gently!” protested the man, trying to check his voluble wife, so that his voice could be heard a little, too. “There is a far better way of making money than the one you propose: besides, if I have all the labour of planting and tending the trees in their infancy, it is but just that you should share in the work likewise. I hardly call driving into the town in the donkey cart which I must buy, a fair division of labour. So many folk about here dispose of their apples in the way you suggest we should do, that I doubt if we should succeed in selling our large crop at all, and it would be sinful to let them lie on the ground and rot,

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and we could not eat them all up ourselves during the winter. That is a pretty way of doing business ! We are too clever for that. No, we will grow the apples, bushels and bushels of them, but not to be hawked about the town. Our apples shall be made into cider. That shall be your task under my direction, and far and wide shall our reputation spread as the makers of this delicious beverage. Such a number of people will deal with us for it that I fear we shall have to move into a house built in a wider road. There is not room in this lane for one cart to pass another, and I am sure many will wish to drive up to our door. I, too, may be able to earn extra money by holding the horses' heads while our customers are within buying the cider from you. That is another advantage which I am sure you had forgotten."

But the face of the wife was clouded, and she did not hesitate to frown as she expressed her strong disapproval of the new scheme.

"If we take to cider-making it means I shall be obliged to work all day long. My life will be harder even than it is now, when, goodness knows, it is a rare trouble to get the place in order and the dinner ready by the time you come in. It is of yourself you are thinking, I'll be bound, and it is many a drink of cider you would enjoy if I were such a fool as to consent to brew it. No, if you want cider, *you* shall make it. I will be content to gather the windfalls from our orchard

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and help you pick the fruit when it is ready. But not a hand do I move for anything else. I am too clever. Cider-making indeed. Slavery!"

"How is it possible to earn money when you won't do your share of the work?" grumbled the man. "If I grow the apple trees would you honour them sometimes with sitting beneath their shade? You might serve to scare the birds away; or perhaps, madam, that also is too hard work for you?"

"Don't you speak to me like that," his wife screamed, "for I won't have it. Scare the birds, indeed! Why, if the young trees saw *your* face, they would wither from shock, and then there would be no fruit for cider or anything else."

"What is the matter with my face?" he shouted back. "It is as good as yours any day. Better. Why, if I had——"

"Gently! Gently!" cried a voice at the open door, and when the two angry people glanced up they were ashamed to see their lodger watching them, with a most startled look upon his usually placid countenance. His pale face seemed paler than ever, his straight, fair hair stood almost erect with surprise as he gazed at the infuriated pair, and realised he had arrived in time to prevent blows between them.

"Hot words! Hot words!" he said reprovingly. "What can there be to make such trouble 'twixt man and wife?"

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Eagerly they rushed forward to speak—each forgetting their rage in the desire to be the first to give an account of their grievance, for each wished to obtain the sympathy of the lodger before he had time to hear the other side. But as they would speak together, it was long before the patient listener could make out the cause of the trouble, and when he did so, he seemed powerless to advise.

“I take the dispute to be this,” he said. “You,” he went on, indicating his now tearful landlady, “desire to sell the apples in the market-place without being put to the trouble of using them for any special purpose beforehand, while you,” he continued, addressing his sulky landlord, “would prefer to convert them into cider; that, in your eyes, being a method by which you can make more money in a shorter space of time than by disposing of the raw fruit.”

“That’s it,” agreed the man, with a fierce scowl at his wife, “and I have nothing more to say, except, as the apple trees are mine, I shall do as I like with the fruit that comes off them.”

“Oh, indeed, will you!” snapped the woman. “Well, you get somebody else to make your wretched cider, for I won’t do it, let me tell you.”

“Hush! Oh—do hush!” implored the lodger, whose head was beginning to ache, so great was the din. “Be silent and calm for a few minutes, I pray. You are each so greatly in the wrong that it will be a

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simple matter to set you right, if you will only allow me to speak. I have heard what you have to say, and as I understand each side of the question, I tell you at once you are both making a most serious mistake. However gréat may be the number of apples you grow, do not sell them as raw fruit in the market——”

“There !” exclaimed the man, triumphantly nodding at his wife. “What did I say ?”

“ . . . But that, indeed, would be better than making them into cider——”

“I told you so,” declared the woman, smiling with pleasure, for she fancied the lodger was completely in agreement with her. “I told you so. No cider-making for me !”

“Quite so,” said the lodger, delighted with his popularity, for he was a sensitive young man at heart, and had often felt pained to see what little heed was given to any remark he chose to utter. “Grow your fruit in large quantities, and let the trees in the orchard be borne down with the weight. Have the donkey cart if you wish, but instead of toiling to the market either with cider or apples, drive from one great house to another, selling—what ? Can’t you guess ?”

“No,” said the couple, awed to silence by the impressive tone of the speaker.

“*Apple Jelly*,” announced the lodger, in a voice quivering with pride.

For a moment, but only a moment, peace reigned,

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though, indeed, even then the calm was broken by two gasps of surprise, but swiftly the couple pulled themselves together, and with a cry of rage, they rushed on



BEGAN TO BELABOUR HIM WITH ALL THEIR MIGHT AND MAIN

the lodger and began to belabour him with all their might and main.

"Fool! fool!" cried the woman. "Apple jelly would give me more trouble even than cider. And now that you have put that idea into my husband's head, he will not forget it. How I wish you had

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never set foot in this cottage," she continued, striking him viciously with the poker, while he, poor man, in his endeavour to avoid the weapon, collided with the husband, who, after cuffing him soundly for his absurd suggestion, pushed him so roughly into a corner that, in trying to save himself, he pulled over the little wooden dresser on which stood the entire stock of household crockery.

The uproar was heard in the lane by the generous neighbour who had promised to start the little orchard with a cutting from one of his own apple trees; indeed, he was just taking the pruning knife from his house to help him carry out his promise, when the shouts and cries made him hurry to offer what assistance he was able. As he reached the door, he saw the couple looking somewhat ashamed at each other, while the lodger, upon whom they really depended for the rent, extricated himself from the mass of broken china. After brushing the chips of it from his torn clothes, he laid a week's money in lieu of notice upon the window-sill, and then limped hurriedly away, muttering as he did so that he would send for his belongings later. To the neighbour was the whole story poured out, even the foolish suggestion concerning the apple jelly was remembered, for that was the one thing upon which this quarrelsome pair could agree. When they had finished their narrative, the listener made a very wise remark.

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"Show me the apples," he said, "then I can tell you in an instant whether the fruit is more suited for cider or jelly ; though perhaps, even, it is not worth using for either."

The husband and wife looked at each other in dismay.

"We have no apples *yet*," they were obliged to explain, "but as you offered to give us a cutting from one of your trees we have been planning what to do with the fruit."

"Oh, what foolish folk you are," declared the neighbour. "How much better it would have been if, instead of quarrelling as you have done, you had prepared the orchard to receive the gift I promised you. Now, however, I refuse to give it to you, for I do not consider you are to be trusted."

"Oh ! then we shall starve, I know we shall," wailed the woman.

But the neighbour shook his head as he pointed to the form of the lodger who was hurrying swiftly down the lane.

"It will be your fault if you do," he said. "Another time learn to control your temper and attend to the matter close at hand. Now you must give up all hope of an apple orchard, every bit of crockery is broken, and instead of a fine crop of fruit to help pay the rent, you have nothing. In fact, you have neither lodger nor apples."

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When he had departed, the woman shrugged her shoulders. "Now I think of it," she declared, "his own trees looked very weak. Had we accepted the cutting he offered, we might have brought the blight into our orchard. How dreadful that would have been."

The man nodded his head. "I daresay we are far better as we are," he said. "The next time he wants to give us anything we will tell him to mind his own business."

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If you treat as real what is but a castle in the air, you are probably looking for trouble.



THE SEEDS OF HARMONY

LONG ago there dwelt a Prince whose fondness for music was so great that he spent the chief part of each day playing upon an organ. Far away from the rest of the Palace he had a large room which contained a model of every organ that had been built, for directly the Prince heard of any improvement being made in the instrument he never rested until one belonged to him. But though each organ was perfect of its kind, and the youth himself a talented musician, nothing seemed to satisfy the craving of his soul. For hours he would sit playing with skilful earnestness until melodious sounds rose one by one at the bidding of his clever fingers, but just at the very moment when it would have been thought that the Prince was attaining the perfection of harmony he would jump to his feet, and with his own hands break up the organ in his utter despair. For deep down in the Prince's heart there was a craving to obtain a sound more perfect, more human, than any he had yet heard. But, although he spent much time and money in these attempts, he never succeeded in pro-

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ducing the exact note he yearned for, and often his failures made him very sad.

One day, however, the Prince decided to build his own organ, for his knowledge concerning the mechanism of the pipes was so great that he felt sure he would be able to construct an instrument that would satisfy his longing. Accordingly he selected some stately old trees that grew in the neighbourhood of the Palace, and he had them hewn down, and then with his own hands he made the instrument in the shape that he wished, praying as he completed each portion of his self-appointed task that he might thus produce an instrument whose sounds would satisfy him. But the fruits of his labour were useless, for the organ he had struggled to make was no better than those he already possessed. And still the Prince determined to produce the beautiful sound he yearned for, and though dejection filled his heart, he would not be conquered, and he decided to build yet another organ.

"It may be that I failed because I used old, dry wood," he told himself. "Wood that has long ceased to remember the sap that ran through its branches. Perhaps in young, green wood—wood that retains the sap of life—I shall find the secret of the sound I seek."

So the Prince went forth and again selected trees to be hewn down, but now his choice fell upon the saplings that had only enjoyed their lives but for a short while, and, though they grew tall and straight in the sunshine,

The Seeds of Harmony

he gave little thought to their beauty, for he needed their wood to build with.

And after much toil—for the Prince worked alone—the instrument was complete, and as its maker sat down before the keys, he looked upwards in thankfulness for he felt he was going to succeed. He played melody after melody, which rose and filled the vast room with music, but he persevered until at last almost human, nay—beyond human, almost angelic—came the sound which he prayed to hear, the sound that always sang in his heart.

But, alas, after many days a change came over the instrument. The note he loved grew fainter and fainter until it died altogether, while the rest of the notes became weak and muffled. In his sorrow, he took the organ to pieces, saying, "I seek to learn what has defeated me," and as its parts lay strewn upon the floor the Prince saw that the wood which he had so ruthlessly cut down had again begun to sprout. For the saplings had retained their life, and the pipes of the organ had become choked with the young green shoots. The Prince was grievously distressed, but in his disappointment he did not forget that his ear had once been greeted by the sound he yearned for, so he would not destroy this organ as he had destroyed the others, but he carried it, piece by piece, into the garden, and after digging a hole he buried it, as he would have buried a human friend. Daily the Prince visited the

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spot where lay the discarded instrument, and in a little while a plant of great beauty sprang out of the earth ; and as it stretched its branches forth so that the warmth of the sun should strengthen it the Prince watched and wondered, but far more so indeed when the plant began to bud. In time flowers of a rare and delicate hue appeared among the foliage, and the Prince, remembering what lay beneath the soil, christened them the Flowers of Harmony, and as he guarded his possession the petals began to fall, leaving in their stead large pods full of a marvellous seed, which the Prince, finding they resembled nothing he had known before, christened the Seeds of Harmony. As there had been many flowers, so were there many pods, each full of seeds so perfect in shape and of such marvellous iridescence that the Prince was loth to part with any, until one day there came to him a man who brought tidings of wrath and dissension in the village. So the Prince went to the Flowers of Harmony, and gathering a small handful of the rare seeds he set out for the village, which was situated at the foot of the hill. As he passed the open doors of each cottage the sounds of angry voices fell upon his ears. Husbands quarrelled with their wives, children with each other, while merchant strove with merchant to become rich and thus tyrannise over the people, and there was no prosperity in the village, neither was there peace. And as the Prince heard the sound of strife raging around he

The Seeds of Harmony

dropped one of the Seeds of Harmony in each of the gardens fronting the houses in which the people dwelt, and there, in due season, grew up the same flower that was in blossom in the Palace grounds just where the organ was buried. And lo, in a short time, peace fell upon the village—husbands were seen in loving converse with their wives, children played gently by the wayside, and merchants, striving no longer to overreach each other, traded in brotherly fashion, justly and with all consideration. Daily the Prince walked in the garden of the Palace, and when there he would pause and look with thankfulness upon the flowers that grew before him, while it became one of his chief delights to pass through the village and observe the peace that the Seeds of Harmony had given. And as time went on the Prince grew content and happy in the contemplation of the happiness of his people.

But at length this contentment was disturbed by the news that in another state had broken out a cruel civil war. Brother fought against brother, child against parent, while the hands of all men were raised against their neighbours. The thought of such a dreadful thing troubled the Prince, until he remembered the beneficial results he had once been able to bring about. "I have healed the quarrels in the village," he said, "and taught the people therein to dwell in peace one with another. If the Seeds of Harmony have this power in one place, surely it will be the same elsewhere."

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So the Prince went into his garden to look upon the wonderful plant for the last time, and as he bade it farewell he filled a little bag with its seeds, and these seeds he carried on his person when he sailed away in the vessel he had chosen to bear him to the state where the war raged.

When he landed the city had a desolate look, for the merchants—having no buyers to tempt—did not display their wares upon their stalls, while neither women nor children walked in the empty streets. But though the Prince had never been in the city before, he showed no hesitation, for his quick ears caught the sound of fighting, and soon led him to the spot whence the clang of battle proceeded. And what a terrible sight there met his eyes! The beautiful market-place was crowded with a seething mob of men, each of whom, it seemed to the Prince, was striving to kill his neighbour. On the ground there lay many dead or wounded, but those who were unharmed heeded them not. With horror-stricken eyes the Prince gazed at the prospect before him, until a stray bolt from a cross-bow, speeding in his direction, caught him between the shoulders and he fell prone to the ground, still grasping his bag of seeds. All that day the battle raged, until when night came the combatants, too tired and exhausted to strike another blow, separated and went their ways, with their hearts full of evil resolves to continue the fray in the morning, when they were rested. And silence reigned upon the

The Seeds of Harmony

market-place, a silence that was unbroken until a party of men came out by moonlight to bury their less fortunate comrades.

One amongst them, while achieving his sorrowful task, approached near to the body of the Prince, and, with a gesture of surprise, turned him over so that he could see his face. As he did so a little bag fell from his hand, and the soldier eagerly seized upon it. "So," cried one of the men, "we are going to be paid for our trouble. The stranger has wealth!" And as he opened the bag his comrades crowded round, clamouring greedily for their share of the spoil. Slowly the seeds rolled into the outstretched hand of the man who picked them up, until he, bitterly disappointed at what he thought their worthlessness, flung them into the grave, saying, with a coarse laugh, as he did so, "Let him keep these seeds, they are of no value to us."

But in a little while on the grave of the dead Prince there sprang up a plant of great beauty, which began to bud until, very soon, the Flower of Harmony flourished in the midst of these fighting people. And the strife continued without ceasing until the pods began to form upon the plant, and as they ripened and scattered their seeds peace slowly but surely came to the distracted city. Brother grew gentler to brother, son more loving to parent, until soon the fighting stopped altogether. Men went about their daily

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avocations with a cheerful heart, the gaily coloured goods of the merchants were once more exposed temptingly upon the stalls, and the people, as they gripped hands, wondered how any unkindly feeling towards each other could ever have entered their hearts.

And the Flower of Harmony as it sprang from the grave of the Prince grew loftier and loftier as the years advanced, until it seemed to stretch out its boughs like arms invoking a blessing towards the now peaceful city. In summer time under these boughs the people sheltered themselves from the glare of the sun, watching the children at their games, and rejoicing as they did so that these dissensions had died out among them; while in winter, as the high wind played among the branches, it occasionally produced a sound almost human—nay, beyond human, almost angelic—a sound resembling the note the Prince had yearned for.

THREE KISSES



I WILL accompany you upon your journey as far as the cross-roads," said King Inaloo, "so that our subjects may see us as we pass along and say: 'It is evident that his Majesty does not send his son away from the Palace in anger, otherwise he would not ride by his side. No doubt the young man but goes forth to see the world before settling down to reign. How happy he seems; all must be at peace at Court.'"

So the Monarch and the Prince mounted their steeds, and, attended by a small retinue, moved slowly through the streets until the outskirts of the town were passed, and the route became less frequented by the people, who would insist upon cheering, and thus, by their inopportune ex-

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pression of loyalty, spoil the last few minutes of conversation left to the riders.

The young Prince was fair to look upon, and his handsome figure appeared to great advantage as he checked his restless horse without exhibiting the slightest concern at the animal's obvious desire to get on; and as he rode he bent his head with filial deference towards the aged Monarch, so that he might carefully attend to the words he uttered. When they reached the spot at which they were to separate, the entire party drew rein and father and son advanced a few yards without an escort, so that their parting words should not be spoken within earshot of the others. And while Prince Mengel listened, his steed, still anxious to start, pawed the ground in evident impatience as he waited for a sign from his master.

"My dear boy," said the King with a tremulous voice, for he was very fond of his son and could not bear to part from him, even for a few hours, "my son, I am an old man now; my bones are bent and sore, while my senses are becoming so dulled and enfeebled, that it is easy to guess my days on the throne are numbered. The reason that I have in encouraging you to ride forth to seek a wife, is that I may see her whom you think worthy to sit on the throne as Queen before my end comes; we have but little time left to spend together, so let me beg you to hearken carefully to what I tell you. I do not dare to say that my words

The Three Kisses

are the words of wisdom, but the little knowledge I possess is the natural outcome of the many experiences—some pleasant, some bitter—contained in my long life. Do not ask the first royal maiden you meet to be your wife, simply because she is a Princess. Unless you find a good Princess, the daughter of a King may be as unworthy to sit on a throne as her meanest subject."

"That is indeed so," admitted Mengel, trying to rein his horse close to the King, so they might lower their voices during the conversation, "but how can I be sure that my choice is a wise one, even though it is made with great caution? Must the lady be pretty, sire?"

"Nay!" said the father promptly. "A pretty face often hides an empty, and alas, at times, an evil mind. But remember this—the only way by which you can make a marriage that will bring you lasting happiness, and to her the love and respect of her subjects—she whom you wed must be willing to give away three kisses before you are betrothed, but only three."

The Prince smiled to himself somewhat complacently. "What a simple condition!" he said. "If the maiden loved me and we were alone together, surely, if I pleaded on bended knee, she would grant me three such favours; more, perhaps, if my entreaties touched her heart. Who knows?"

But the King shook his white head impatiently. "I did not say they were to be given to you, though

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I am sure with your bonnie face you might win many. No, the maiden you select for your bride must be she who will bestow a kiss of sympathy upon the suffering, the weary, or the troubled, a kiss of peace upon her enemies and those who wrong her either by thought or deed, and lastly, but now draw near and mark my words carefully, for this is the most important of the three, and only she who gives this is worthy to sit on a throne——”

“Well, father, speak on. I would fain learn everything.”

“Lastly, she must give the kiss of——”

But at this critical moment the Prince's horse, who had been stamping about unceasingly during the entire conversation, now bounded forward, and though the young man tried to check him and force him to return, his efforts were futile, and he was obliged to wave his hand to the old King, who stood sadly watching him, while he rode away pondering over his father's words. How he wished, he thought regretfully, that the King had been able to finish his sentence. He knew his aged parent had been speaking wisely, and though he stored up his remarks carefully, he felt it was indeed hard that the most important part of his discourse should not have been uttered. But, anyhow, he would watch for the two kisses that denoted sympathy and peace, and perhaps, in time, he might be able to guess what the third one could be.

The Three Kisses

So feeling a little less depressed, his Royal Highness rode quickly forward, for he was anxious that day to arrive at a small kingdom called Daretta, in which he knew reigned a young, unwedded Queen.

After he had passed through the gates of the town which formed his destination, he met an old crone who was urging a donkey along the road, with the assistance of a stout stick and many uncanny guttural noises, but the animal, no doubt accustomed through many years of experience to such a proceeding, treated all her efforts with calm contempt and refused to alter its pace in the slightest degree. The Prince checked his horse, and waited with some amusement until the vehicle drew near, then bending down he asked the exasperated driver if he had arrived at Daretta, or whether he had made a mistake in his route.

"No, you're right enough," said the old woman civilly. "But Daretta isn't what it used to be in my young days."

"No?" said the Prince sympathetically.

"No. The changes I have seen made round about are marvellous, but I hear they are nothing to what goes on at the Palace. Dancing and feasting all night long. But maybe it's only rumour, though our Queen has always been one to have her own way, they do say; and what does it matter to us poor folk?"

"Then her Majesty has not yet selected a husband?" asked Mengel anxiously.

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"No, nor likely to," was the reply, "though all her subjects would be glad to see her wed, I know well enough."

The Prince glowed with expectation as he heard this statement, and he looked forward to meeting this royal lady and perhaps bringing her back in triumph as his bride. He knew, however, he was not bound to act in this manner ; though if he wished to do so, he was free to offer himself as a possible suitor for her hand ; but remembering his father's words, he determined to do nothing in a hurry. Tossing the old woman a silver piece, he rode on, his mind full of speculation as to his future, and still trying to find a probable solution for the third kiss.

Soon he could see the grey towers of the Palace rising far into the sky before him, so urging his horse to a quick trot, he rode on until he stood outside a big drawbridge and loudly demanded admittance. An old warrior, scarred and seared by many encounters with the enemy in the days of his youth, appeared to ask the stranger's business, saying that unless he considered it quite satisfactory he should not allow him to pass. The Prince drew himself up haughtily and his independent spirit chafed at such questioning, until he remembered that the crown, with its attendant cares and worries, was resting upon the brow of an inexperienced maiden, and that, therefore, no precaution taken for her welfare could be considered too much.

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So he smiled into the anxious face of the old soldier and then reassured him.

"Do not fear!" he said. "I am the bearer of no tidings good or bad; neither do I seek her Majesty to work evil towards her. I am the Prince Mengel, only son of King Inaloo, and I have ridden here to meet your Queen in all faith and friendliness."

"That is well," said his companion approvingly. "May the best of luck be yours!" he added, standing aside to allow the young fellow to pass. So, with these encouraging words, which he regarded as a good omen, the Prince rode across the drawbridge, and after dismounting and watching his horse being led away, he entered the great hall and wondered what he should do.

He changed from his dusty riding attire into a satin suit of a delicate hue, richly embroidered with jewels and heavily trimmed with costly fur, and then he announced that he was ready to meet the Queen Indeera, and was accordingly conducted with great solemnity to her presence.

When the Prince entered the gorgeous apartment in which her Majesty had decided to see him, the glare of the lights and the brightness of the scene was almost enough to dazzle the young fellow, until, however, he was able to collect himself sufficiently to cross the space of polished floor that separated them, and, throwing himself on one knee before the royal maiden, raise her hand to his lips. But, as he did so, he could not help observ-

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ing the roughness of her skin, the ill-kept condition of her nails, while the ugly plebeian shape of her hand gave him quite a shock. With a sensation of dissatisfaction, he rose to his feet and glanced critically at the Queen. What a feeling of disappointment was his! Where was the beauty and grace he had expected to belong to the lady he hoped to make his future wife? Instead of a vision of loveliness, his eye rested upon rather a fat common type of face surrounded by an untidy tangle of red hair, upon which the crown was poised in a very unsafe manner. The Prince carefully inspected the face, the clumsy figure, and the rough, red hands again, to see if his first impression had been unjust; but when he found he could not make it more favourable, he gave a little sigh and turned away. But the loud voice of his hostess recalled him immediately.

“Well, Prince,” she said abruptly, “glad to see you. Had a nice trot over, eh?”

Mengel almost shuddered with horror as he heard her familiar remarks, which he answered with great courtesy.

“I thank you for your words of welcome, your Majesty,” he replied gravely, “and I beg to assure you, in answer to your kind inquiries, I had a most agreeable journey.”

“Left the old man well, I hope?” she went on briskly. “Glad to see the back of you for a bit, I daresay!”

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“The old man ! What impertinence !” thought the Prince indignantly, and as he flushed with anger and looked away, his eye rested upon another face containing all the beauty and refinement that Indeera lacked. “What an ideal Queen this girl would have been !” the young man thought sadly as he realised how far superior, in this case, the maid Sara was to her mistress. When dinner was announced he caught a glimpse of her as she moved along behind the Queen, and her grace was such that he was still greatly attracted by her, a sensation which he evidently shared with several others, for he saw that many watched her with admiration as the meal progressed. Once or twice Mengel looked up and found her gazing at him as he tried to entertain Indeera, whose only desire seemed to be to make a hearty dinner in a short space of time, and when he saw the look of sadness her eyes contained, he wondered what caused it.

At last this most uncomfortable repast was over, and as the party assembled once again in the State Chamber, the Prince felt too disgusted and annoyed with his impossible hostess to remain in her presence, so he begged leave to retreat to his own apartments, pleading weariness after his ride as an excuse for retiring so early. When left alone in his room, the Prince threw himself into his chair with a groan of vexation. So this was the end of his journey. He had travelled all these miles simply to discover how great a mistake he had made, for well he knew that never could any mortal

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honestly declare the Queen to be pretty, or even fascinating in her ways. What hair ! What hands ! And how untidy she was ! But as he thought again of her lovely handmaiden he decided to remain a little longer in the Palace, for he had become strangely interested in the girl, and, in spite of her humble position, wished to know more about her.

The next few days that Mengel spent at the Court were very unsatisfactory. Knowing such a union would please his father exceedingly, he tried to resign himself to the inevitable and propose to this royal but uncouth maiden, who, as he became better acquainted with her, proved herself to be in possession of none of the qualities for which he sought. Full well he knew she would never bestow the three kisses that would show her to be far above other women, for as time went on her true character revealed itself as being mean, sordid, and hard to a degree. Perhaps the contrast was all the more noticeable by the comparison which naturally arose between the mistress and her maid, who, with exemplary patience, bore with Indeera's fits of temper and always considered her comfort and happiness in every way.

One hot afternoon the Queen, escorted by Mengel and chaperoned by her handmaiden, was passing along the road close to the Palace gates when a strange whining sound attracted her attention.

"What can that be ?" she quoth. "It is a noise that I have never heard before."

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But the tender-hearted Sara hastened to join the little group, and said, with her lovely eyes full of tears : "Oh, it is the wail of some poor dog in distress ! Alas ! alas !"

"Is that all ?" said the Queen, shrugging her shoulders indifferently. "Then we can go on again—otherwise we shall be late for dinner."

"Ah ! your Majesty," pleaded the maid, "let me remain behind five minutes. Yonder lies the dog and even from here I can see how worn and hungry he looks. I believe he is faint from want of food, and he seems so footsore and weary. Let me minister to his needs, I beg."

But the Queen was most indignant at the suggestion and scolded Sara all the way home, speaking in her wrath words which were as cruel as they were unjust. During this little scene the Prince remained discreetly silent, though he noted the exact spot where the suffering animal lay, and determined to return to its aid directly he could escape from the Queen. In a few minutes, therefore, he was back again at the spot, but as he stood wondering what was the best thing to do, light footsteps sounded behind him, and when he turned round he saw the good-natured Sara running towards him, carrying in her hands a little basket full of nice things.

"Her Majesty is resting for an hour," she explained shyly, "and I could not bear to leave the dog alone."

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Come, poor fellow, here is some meat for you," she said coaxingly to the animal, who crawled to her side and gratefully took the food from her hand. When he had finished eating, and the maiden tenderly washed and bound up his cut feet, her hot tears fell upon his dusty paw as she saw the marks of pain and want which were so pathetically evident upon the dumb creature. But when her task was over she found even then the dog was too tired to follow her to the Palace, whither she intended taking it. And as she saw the animal's helplessness she bent down and, after embracing it tenderly, gathered it to her bosom and carried it home. The sight of that kiss given by one who had quite forgotten his presence came as a revelation to the Prince, for well he knew it was the kiss of sympathy the old King had told him to watch for, and yet it had been bestowed by a humble maid instead of her royal mistress. Full of perplexity, the young man pondered about it all the evening; he being, indeed, so greatly occupied with his thoughts that he was declared by the Queen to be decidedly dull. But even when he retired to rest he lay tossing about half the night as he wondered what he should do.

The following morning all the members of the royal household were thrown into a state of nervous terror, for it quickly became known that Queen Indeera had arisen in a very bad temper;—an unfortunate incident which caused many to shudder. In the corridor

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Mengel encountered several of her ladies-in-waiting hurrying from her presence in floods of tears, while the stories of her rage made even the Prince, fine strong man though he was, rather dread to see her. As he paced the rose garden and endeavoured to make up his mind to meet this trying personage, he saw, to his horror, she was hastening along the path to greet him, followed by the patient Sara, who was trying to check the flow of indignant words. As she approached, the Prince observed with a shudder how red and dishevelled she appeared to be, while her maid, with eyes full of troubled tenderness, tried in vain to soothe her.

"So, Sir Prince," she cried mockingly, "you are strangely unworthy of the honourable name you bear when, in company with my servant, you disobey my orders."

Mengel flushed angrily, for he naturally resented being thus addressed; but he determined to curb his wrath until he had learnt in what way he had given cause for offence.

"Forsooth, I do indeed cease to be mistress in my own Palace when both maid and guest treat my words as naught."

"Your Majesty," said the young man soothingly, "tell me, I pray you, what I have done to thus vex you. Whilst under your roof I have tried to please you in every way."

But the Queen would not be appeased. "It was

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strange conduct, surely," she said angrily, "to seek out the footsore, dusty cur we saw yesterday and minister to its unnecessary wants, when I previously passed it by. It was like Sara to disobey me, I know, but my guest should respect my slightest wish. But to creep out of the Palace in company with this plotting girl here and wilfully act against my orders is unendurable."

"Your Majesty," said the Prince, who was astonished at such a fuss occurring over so small a matter, "our wrong-doing—if such an act can so be described—was committed solely in the cause of mercy. The dog was in pain, but though the idea of relieving it came to both of us, I beg you to understand we both acted separately and did not plot one with another."

"I do not care what you say," said the Queen furiously. "All I know is that this girl, Sara, defied me and encourages you to do the same, and that is a thing I will not allow with impunity. I refuse to discuss the matter further, but I would have you know that, though I am silent about it, I shall never forget what has happened."

And then the tender-hearted maid, distressed beyond measure at her mistress's vexation, hurried forward and, dropping humbly upon the ground before the indignant Queen, repeated her apology for the second time. Her beautiful eyes were swimming with tears, her face looked pale and fragile as she raised it entreatingly towards Indeera, who, still unable to con-



DROPPING HUMBLY UPON THE GROUND.

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quer her displeasure, bent swiftly down and soundly boxed the ears of the girl.

"You have my answer," she cried, "and now leave me."

With a cry of pain the girl gathered herself together and fled, while the Prince, after looking hesitatingly at the face of the Queen, decided to escape also ; so the two stole away, leaving her Majesty to enjoy in uninterrupted solitude the pleasures of the garden.

When he entered the Palace he overtook Sara, whose pretty ears were still burning from the force of the blow. She looked more lovely than ever in her distress, while the tears she had shed so enhanced her beauty that Mengel could not resist stopping to speak.

"I should like to say," he remarked kindly, "how grieved I am for what has happened, especially for all the unpleasantness you have endured with such fortitude."

The girl smiled bravely up at him as she replied :—

"You must not let it worry you; no doubt I was in the wrong and deserved my punishment. Her Majesty is so kind to me that, even though she be a little quick-tempered, she would not treat me as she has done with-out good motive."

"Loyal little heart !" exclaimed the Prince. "I would I, too, could have such a staunch defender."

Sara lowered her eyes and blushed at this remark.

"I love the Queen," she said simply. "I could not

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bear to hear her ill-spoken of. It would be the same with all people, too."

"Any man winning your affection," said Mengel gravely, "would own a priceless jewel."

"Náy," she replied with a little sigh, "I am but a handmaiden of the Queen—none will stoop to woo me."

At these words the young man's heart beat so fiercely that he longed to beseech her to marry him. From the first moment he saw her he had felt greatly attracted by her gentleness and beauty, and as day by day passed this feeling gradually became stronger until it had developed into an almost overmastering love, which would not let him rest nor be happy until he had won the maiden for his own. But caution checked him, for, with a feeling of dismay, he remembered he had yet to await the test his father had spoken of. One kiss had already been bestowed, and though he knew what the other was to be, he still felt troubled concerning the third, which he could not ascribe to anything. Before declaring his love, he determined to return to his home and consult with the wise old King, for in this great act of his life he did not want to do anything to cause him disappointment. So he turned to Sara again and looked long into her earnest eyes before he spoke.

"I am going away to-morrow," he said gravely. "Will you forget me, do you think?"

"Going away!" she echoed, growing pale as she

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realised how much his presence meant to her. "No, I shall never forget. What can I do, living here day by day, but remember the happiness your visit brought to me? Every flower in the garden, every stone in the Palace walls, will speak to me of you. Forget, indeed! Ah, no! But take these," she went on, drawing from her belt a little bunch of pale-blue blossoms. "You will go into a world of gaiety and pleasure; perhaps these few flowers may be to you a token of your visit here—a memory of what is over."

And then, with a little sob, she retraced her steps to the rose garden, whither she sought the Queen, quite unconscious, meanwhile, that Mengel had followed her and was close behind. In an arbour covered with overhanging fragrant blossoms she discovered her Majesty, whose recent fits of rage had so fatigued her, that though it was but the middle of the morning, she had rested her hand upon her head and gone fast asleep.

Sara stood looking down at her with eyes full of compassion. She remembered well enough the angry words that had been spoken to her; a dull pain in her head reminded her of the blow she had received; but, as she saw the flushed, tear-stained face of her mistress, she forgot everything in her great desire for a reconciliation. With a stealthy footstep she glided forward, and then, bending down, tenderly imprinted one kiss upon the Queen's cheek. Indeera stirred uneasily, and then a little sigh broke from her as she sank into a

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deeper slumber, while Sara walked softly from the arbour and joined Mengel, who was impatiently waiting for her. Now, at last, he was determined to ask the maiden to marry him, for well he knew he had just seen her bestow a kiss of forgiveness upon one who had grievously wronged her ; and that following, as it did, upon the kiss of sympathy, made him positive she was the bride for him, especially as he knew how deeply he loved her.

Taking her by the hand, he led her to a less frequented portion of the garden and there drew her down upon a seat by his side. Many sentences he arranged in his head with which to tell her all he felt, but when he commenced they sounded all wrong, and he realised he must speak from his heart and by no set rule. What he wanted to say could be spoken in so few words that it hardly seemed possible they could mean so much to him.

“Sara,” he said tenderly, his voice quivering with excitement, “Sara, I love you ; will you marry me ?”

But she shook her head, and seemed as though she would leave him.

“I am not worthy,” she faltered. “You are a Prince, while I am but a servant of her Majesty.”

“Be my wife,” he urged, “and I will make you the richest lady in the land. Rank, power, wealth, and jewels shall be yours ; but, above all, if you will only

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let me try, I think I could make your life very happy, sweetheart."

"To pass my days by your side would be to give me my heart's desire," she confessed shyly; and then he was content, for well he knew she loved him.

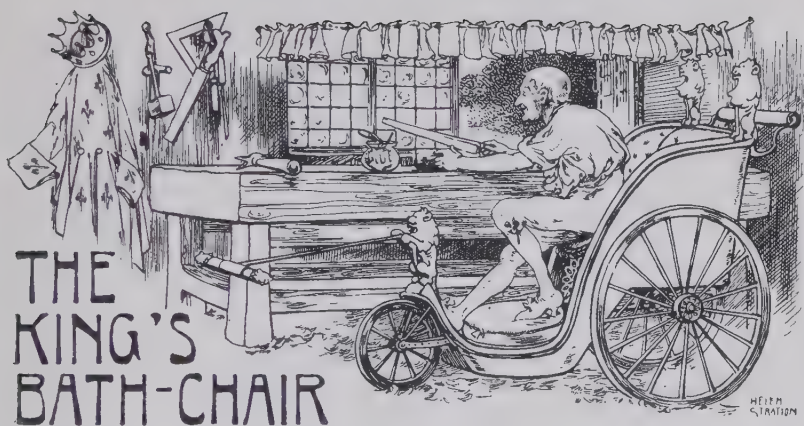
So, sitting hand in hand, he told her the story of his setting off from his home in search of a bride, the warning his father had given him, and the tests he was to watch for; but when he, after relating how he had seen her give two kisses, admitted his inability to discover the third, she smiled mysteriously.

"I know," he explained to her, "that unless I can find out to what the third kiss relates, my marriage will be a bitter mistake, for the King told me it was the most important test of all, and the one likely to bring us the greatest happiness."

"Your father was right, I am sure," she said. "Well do I know of what he spoke."

"Do you understand what he meant?" exclaimed the Prince. "Then all is well; though tell me too, darling, I beg you, let me share your secret!"

"I think," whispered the girl, putting her arms about his neck and pressing her lips fondly upon his, "I think he spoke of the kiss of love. Surely that is the greatest of all."



THE KING'S BATH-CHAIR

FOR several years old King Inerleah had been considered the most marvellous person within the kingdom. In spite of his great age, his love of mechanism was so strong that he would spend hours in his workshop labouring to achieve results which would astonish his subjects ; but, though he could be heard briskly at work, none had ever been permitted to see the fruits of his labour, and he was always silent concerning his special hobby.

But what was more extraordinary still, and puzzled the Lord Chancellor, the Prime Minister, and everybody concerned with the government of the land, was the intimate knowledge his Majesty possessed with regard to the doings of other countries ; the information with which

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his mind was stocked was so accurate that not even upon the smallest detail was there anything left to tell him. Every important event that happened in the most distant part of the world he instantly knew about and would discourse learnedly upon, while the news itself would not arrive until many days afterwards, when the King would say, with a feeble wave of his hand, "Oh, *that* ! I knew all about that long ago. Tell me something novel, I beg."

This monarch, so aged and infirm that he could never go outside the Palace without being wheeled in his chair, would frequently, when everybody slept, rise from his bed and, wrapping some warm fur rugs around him, steal out of his room and totter to his workshop, where he would be found the following morning fast asleep in the bath-chair which, at his own request, always stood among the tools that, many years ago, he had employed to manufacture it. For the King had made his own chair, and was so proud of his effort that he would allow none other to be used when he desired to be wheeled round the gardens or along the broad terrace.

But in spite of the wonderful energy his Majesty possessed, he knew well enough his days were numbered, and, desiring to show his courtiers some special kindness before he died, he called them all to him.

"I wish, my good friends," he said, "to give to each one of you a souvenir which will remind you of

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me when I am dead. It is not possible, considering my great age, that I can live much longer, therefore I beg of you each to state what there is belonging to me that you would care to possess."

And so in turn, the courtiers chose. One selected the King's favourite charger, another the ruby ring which he always wore, a third some rare books, and so on, until only two brothers remained to speak.

"Come," said his Majesty kindly, "come, Ku-Ku, what shall I give to you?"

And then Ku-Ku, trembling with excitement at the thought of what would soon be his, and with the lust of avarice full upon him, walked stealthily forward and made an obsequious bow.

"The prospect that we may soon lose our royal master so pains me," he said deceitfully, "that I cannot compose myself to think of anything."

"Well, well," replied the King soothingly, "I am not dead yet, my good Ku-Ku, so keep a brave heart and force yourself to collect your thoughts, for it is becoming late, and your brother, Neils, has yet to speak."

"Then," said Ku-Ku humbly, "if I *must* choose, I suppose I must. There is nothing that I really want; therefore one thing is as good as another. Let me have Gold Bank Isle, and we'll consider the discussion closed."

"Gold Bank Isle!" gasped his Majesty. "My

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treasure isle ! Never ! Never ! You are, indeed, a traitor to even make such a suggestion. Away, sir, away ! I cannot bear to look upon you."

"Oh, no," said Ku-Ku calmly. "You undertook to let us all have whatever we asked for, and I have made my choice. Gold Bank Isle is my selection. You cannot be false to your word."

"That is true," said the King thoughtfully. "Therefore take your isle ; but remember this : the sea that flows between the mainland and the isle belongs to me. I will not allow you to go upon my water in any kind of vessel, or even to swim therein. I will issue an order to forbid my boat-builders building any craft for you, or my fishermen lending you their boats. By no manner of means shall you reach Gold Bank Isle, nor shall anybody venture there for you. This shall be made law to-morrow, and sad will be the fate of the man who breaks it."

When Ku-Ku heard the King's declaration he was furious—more so, indeed, when he realised how powerless he was to alter it. It was true he possessed Gold Bank Isle, but what good was the treasure stored upon it if he could not approach to carry it away ? He and his brother had long plotted to get hold of the wealth this isle contained, and now, unless Neils' quick brain devised any scheme to aid them, he could do nothing. As he passed his brother on his way out of the monarch's presence he gave him an expressive glance,

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which was, however, quite wasted. Neils was very upset at all that had happened, for he was just as grasping and tricky as his brother, and had long meant to secure the treasure for himself and give none to Ku-Ku. Therefore his disappointment was so acute that he could not think at all, and when his Majesty called to know what he wished he also shook his head.

But the King was too angry to be trifled with again.

"Come, Neils," he said sharply, "what do you want? Gold Bank Isle has gone, so I'm afraid you can't have that; but surely there is something equally large and profitable you can think of."

"Oh, sire," murmured Neils deprecatingly, "speak not thus to me, for I have no desire to gain by your generosity. Give me your wheel chair, so that, when sitting in it, I can ruminate upon the happy hours we have spent in yonder garden."

Shortly after these events the old King died, and a few days after the funeral Neils went to inspect the bath-chair and see what he could do with it. He really wanted to sell it, as he, like his brother, was very mercenary. Had Ku-Ku been more successful with his request for the isle, Neils would have had a share of the fortune that was on it; but as it was, he mocked at his brother's plight, and consequently there was bad blood between them.

Seeing the case of the chair was inlaid with precious stones, Neils picked up a hammer and began to knock

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them out, when, to his amazement, one side of the chair flew open and disclosed to his gaze a neat row of ivory screws with lovely jewels upon them.

Full of wonder, the young fellow seated himself in the chair and carefully turned one screw. Instantly the chair mounted from the ground and began to soar into the air ; but, with a little practice, Neils soon learnt how to manipulate the entire thing, and he easily discovered what he must do to make it float back to earth. So this was the method by which the dead King had kept himself so well supplied with news from distant shores, thought Neils, as he carefully put the chair back in its accustomed place ; and then a sudden idea came to him. Why should he not, therefore, visit Gold Bank Isle and annex some of the treasure stored there ?

That night, when everybody slept, Neils, just as the old monarch used to do, let himself out of the Palace and, getting into his chair, swiftly flew across to the little isle, and, once there, filled his pockets full of golden pieces before he returned. Again and again he made these nocturnal trips, until, not satisfied with hoarding his wealth in secret, he began to boast about it within the Palace, and Ku-Ku's suspicions were aroused. He noted his young brother looked weary and worn, as though he did not get sufficient sleep, and, as his wealth constantly seemed on the increase, he determined to watch. So when Neils, with a great

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assumption of being glad to get to bed, retired to his room, Ku-Ku crept softly after him, and stretched little threads of white cotton across the door, just to find out if he remained in his room or not. In the morning not one strand remained unbroken, and Ku-Ku decided to hide and ascertain what he did. When the next night came, therefore, he saw his brother open his door, and as he stole out of the Palace Ku-Ku followed him until they both reached the door of the King's workshop and Neils wheeled out the bath-chair. Having seen that everything was in order, Neils prepared to start ; but suddenly he paused and looked round. "Where is my coat?" he muttered. "I must have left it in my room. How careless!" and, leaving the wonderful chair unguarded, he proceeded to run back. When he was out of sight Ku-Ku hastened forward, and, making the most of his few minutes, he hid himself under the rug in the place of the big footstool that generally stood there. He heard his brother return, and felt him seat himself in the chair by the heavy way he placed his feet upon him, and then the motion of the chair told him they were moving. Ku-Ku trembled with excitement, but dared not look out until the chair stopped and he heard his brother's steps receding in the distance ; then he jumped up, and gazed about him with a cry of delight. "Gold Bank Isle!" he screamed, "the treasure isle! Now to be rich!"

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On all sides were signs of the great wealth his Majesty had stored up. Chests of precious stones surrounded him, while chests of golden coins were piled together to form a little protection to the more valuable things. And as Ku-Ku crammed his pockets he sighed regretfully as he thought of the big bag he would have brought if he had only guessed where his adventure would lead him to. Even in his boots he slipped several gold pieces, and as he stood wondering what to fill next he suddenly heard his brother returning.

When Neils saw Ku-Ku standing before him, with his pockets bulging out with ill-gotten gain, he frowned a frown that was not nice to see.

"Thief!" he said curtly, wondering as he spoke how his brother had got over. "Thief! so you come to rob the dead king?"

"Certainly," said Ku-Ku boldly. "And so, I see, do you. This is my first visit, but, as you have been several times, I claim my right, as your elder brother, to demand my share of all you have."

But Neils would not hear of that, and the two argued until the streaks of dawn in the sky warned them they had better be going.

"I am coming, too," said Ku-Ku, as his brother arranged himself before he started.

"Not in my chair, anyhow," said Neils; "this only carries one, and I won't take you."

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"But I insist," screamed Ku-Ku. "You shall obey me, and I must get home somehow. I came in the chair, and I shall return in it, too."

Neils said nothing, but turned the screws, and the chair slowly began to move. Ku-Ku jumped after it, and caught on to the handrail that was at the back, and as the chair moved rapidly away, carrying the two brothers, he felt he was safe.

But as they were passing over the sea the pace of the chair became much slower, and the occupants of it forgot their anger in the new terror which now arose.

"What is the matter with the thing?" said Neils nervously. "Why won't it fly straight?"

"I expect it is all right," replied Ku-Ku, "I daresay we are a heavy load. It will arrive safely, I am sure. We must give it time."

But instead of going forward, the chair began to sink, and Neils, peering down at the vast expanse of sea beneath them, felt very uncomfortable. "We are too heavy," he declared; "that is what it is. Throw your treasure over, Ku-Ku—that will save us."

"Not unless you throw yours, too," replied the other. "You have much more than I have. Now, both together—go!"

A stream of coins came splashing down into the water, and so bright and new were they that they looked like golden rain, but after a few seconds the chair began to sink down once more.



A STREAM OF COINS CAME SPLASHING DOWN.

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"We shall be drowned!" screamed Ku-Ku; "that is what will happen next. Oh, how close we are to the waves! And I can't swim. I wish I had never been a thief, but had stayed quietly in my bed."

"If only I am saved," wailed Neils, as he tucked his toes up to keep them dry, "I will be so good."

But with a sudden splash the chair fell into the sea, and the two brothers found themselves struggling for their lives in the cold water. They could see they were close to the shore, which luckily, by great efforts and thanks to the assistance the waves gave them, they were at length able to reach. As they crept up the beach they looked most deplorable, with their teeth chattering with cold, and water streaming from their clothes. Neils gazed at his brother thoughtfully.

"Ku-Ku," he said at length, "we've not done well, have we? We have lost the treasure, lost the chair, and spoilt our nice suits. This is what comes of stealing."

Ku-Ku nodded his head sadly. "Yes," he assented, "we won't be thieves any longer. I suggest that henceforth we lead honest, straightforward lives, and try to be men that our dear King, had he lived, would have been proud of."

"Good!" cried Neils gladly; "that's it. We'll never steal again!"

The Story of Little Luck



DOWN the path from the mountain the showman toiled with his box of little wooden puppets strapped securely upon his back. He had walked from the village the other side of the valley, and, being feeble and bent with age, he found his load almost more than he could bear, especially as times were so bad that the poor old man had only earned a very few pence for weeks past.

When he reached the village he stopped and looked about him. Some drops of rain were falling, so he knew it would be useless for him to give a performance in the hope of making

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enough money to pay for his night's lodging, so much as he disliked the idea, he realised he would have to rest under a hedge or tree and try to seek shelter there from the storm.

With a weary sigh he shifted his burden in the hope of making it more comfortable to carry, when, just as he was preparing to walk on, a cheery voice caused him to stop.

"Good-evening, showman. Have you far to go with that weight upon your back?"

The old man looked up and met the kindly eyes of a humble peasant woman who, as she stood at the door of her cottage, and watched the children while they played about the road, from time to time gave the visitor a shrewd glance also.

"That depends," he answered, "upon where the next village is. There I must get before the darkness comes on, lest I lose the way and perish in the storm."

"Why not remain the night here?" asked the woman. "A fresh face is sure of a welcome. Some warm supper and a bed would be very grateful to you."

But the showman shook his head. "I have no money to pay for such things," he confessed. "It is hard work for me and my little puppets to earn a living nowadays."

"We'll leave the payment until brighter times," cried the good-hearted woman. "I am not rich myself—far from it—but I have enough to give a good

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meal and a bed to those who are in need. See," she went on, throwing open the door so as to give a view of the interior of the cottage, "the supper is now on the fire cooking, and there is a warm nook by the hearth that looks as though it was made for you to sit in. My little one, too, would never let you leave us to-night, for note how she lurks round you wishing to peep inside the box, and yet she is without the courage to ask permission. Put your things up in yonder barn and come out of the rain. Mine is a lonely life, so I shall enjoy hearing your yarns of other parts. Lor', man, what a lot of coaxing you do want!"

With a grateful heart the showman accepted the kind invitation, and after supper, while smoking his pipe as he warmed himself in front of the fire, he began to amuse his friends with accounts of all that he had seen, while Dura, the child, sat at his feet eagerly drinking in every word as she watched her mother patching and darning the old man's shabby coat, and then, when that task was finished, she saw her proceed to smarten up, and in some of the worst cases re-dress, the wooden puppets, who were, indeed, quite as threadbare as their master.

In the morning the rain had cleared off, and the sun was shining brightly when the guest arose, and, as a mark of gratitude, busied himself about the cottage in many ways. He chopped the wood and carried the water from the brook, until the striking of the clock

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warned him it was time to continue his journey. But he was uneasy in his mind, for well he knew the very slight return he had made for the kind treatment that had been shown him.

As he glanced about in search of a fresh task to perform, his eye caught that of the child Dura, who was watching him intently.

"Would you like a doll, little one?" he asked. "One of my puppets to play with and tend for your own?"

Too excited to reply, the small girl nodded her head, and then stealthily approached as the old man placed his box upon the ground and knelt to unstrap it.

"You must not heed her," cried the mother. "Keep your puppets for yourself. One can ill be spared from its companions."

But the showman was determined to be generous. Here was an excellent way indeed of proving that the hospitality he had received was not quite wasted; and to make the gift more perfect still, he drew forth one little figure he valued far beyond the others and handed it to the child, who, clasping her treasure close to her, gave him a loving kiss as she asked to be told its name.

"The name?" replied the man, smiling at the question. "Well, I've always called her 'Luck'—'Little Luck'—for she has been very dear to me."

"If she's your Luck, you must keep her," cried the

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woman. "When she has gone there is little left in your life, surely."

"Nay, good friend. What further fortune can my life contain? So many years behind me, and so few to come. Besides, it is my good luck to be able to make your child smile with joy. Maybe the puppet will drive all dark shadows from her young life. If this is so, think kindly of the showman who gave his best and whose heart will ever be full of remembrance of his dear friends. Farewell."

It was an easy matter for Little Luck to become the favourite companion of her baby mistress. In spite of her hard wooden head and her long legs, the child found her gift too fascinating to leave, even at night, so when the moon peeped in at the attic window her beams used to shine on the sleeping maiden, while there, with its head on the same pillow, would rest Little Luck, who would lie gazing up with large painted eyes watching that no harm should approach. When the nights were warm and the cool breeze blew across her cheeks, the poor little puppet would think so regretfully of the happy nights she had passed, sleeping in the fields, by the side of the showman, that it was difficult for her to stop fretting to rejoin the master whom she could not forget, for the puppet was not quite so insensible as people supposed. Occasionally at night she had the power of talking to the birds of the air and the many beasts and insects who walk only

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while others sleep, and in her strange misshapen body was the knowledge that some day she, too, would be real and alive and able to talk and laugh and run about as she liked. She guessed the occupants of the cottage looked down upon her because she could not speak when she was spoken to. Even Dura, who, at last, loved her more for old sake's sake than anything, used to pity her because she was dumb ; but then she pitied Carlo too. She thought the dog did not understand much either.

That is where human beings are so silly. Just because some of the most beautiful things in the world cannot speak *their* language, they look down on them as being inferior to themselves, while really all can be heard by those whose hearts are great enough to understand.

Carlo and Little Luck often talked together—indeed, as Dura grew up, they became fast friends, for the dog was old and spent several hours blinking in the sun as he wondered what caused his legs to ache so much and why so many things were blurred to look at. The girl still cherished Little Luck, because she believed she brought happiness to those she lived with ; and now that Jan, a herdsman from over the hill, came so often to woo her, she wanted the best of luck she could obtain.

Carlo and the puppet were present at many talks between the lovers, and as they listened they knew that

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lack of money was what prevented an immediate marriage. "Oh, why were they not rich?" the girl's devoted friends would say to each other, and when they saw Dura's mother pinching and depriving herself to lay by a few silver coins for the young couple, it was more than could be endured.

But, at last, into Little Luck's wooden heart there came an idea. She thought it appeared suddenly—sent, perhaps, by the stars who knew of her desire—but it really grew up slowly and steadily as the result of the loving thoughts she held towards those she cared about. Had she been a real princess, when she spoke pearls would have fallen from her lips; but her mouth was only a streak of paint, so the little notion had to lie quietly until the dog drew near and the two friends could discuss it together.

"If I could walk so far," said Little Luck, "I would go to the Witch who lives beyond the valley and buy gold to help my dear mistress's wedding day to arrive. But I am so foolishly made that all my joints are weak. It would take too long, and if I fell over I could never get up again without help."

"I'll go," exclaimed the dog. "I would do anything to please you; besides, I think I ought to undertake this journey. I am far stronger than you are. Friends always help each other. But if you have money to *buy* gold, why need either of us go? Give Dura your money instead. It would please her so."

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"I have no gold," Little Luck explained; "but I have something of great value to sell. When I have lived a certain number of years the power of walking and talking just like a real human person will be mine. The Witch's only daughter lies under a spell and can neither move nor speak. I am willing to make over to her this privilege in return for a bag of invisible gold to give Dura."

"Oh-h-h," said the wise dog. "You are paying a big price, my wooden friend. You give up a great deal."

"Rubbish!" answered Little Luck. "I am quite content to be a puppet—I am so used to it now. Besides, if these two marry, think how happy you and I will be. Dura has always said to Jan, 'Little Luck must come to our home and the old dog too.'"

"What! and leave Dura's dear mother here all alone!" thought the animal. "Well, they don't consider her much. How strange!"

That night the dog started on his journey. He rested all the day, and then in the cool of the evening he departed, after giving Little Luck a consoling lick, for she was very sad because she could not accompany him.

The lovers were surprised to find Carlo missing when they stood at the gate to bid good-bye to each other; but when Jan had left, the girl soon forgot about him, though her mother crept downstairs many

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times in the night to see if her faithful friend had returned. In the morning the dog lay on the step, very weary and footsore, but after a drink of warm milk he revived enough to tell Little Luck about his visit to the Witch.

"It's all right," he whispered. "She gave me a big bag of gold and the power of making it invisible when we like. It's hidden in my left ear now, so I will pretend to shake my head so as to make it drop out. Then hold it steady with your arm until you want to give it to Dura. It will regain its proper size the moment she touches it."

That evening the lovers sat on a seat outside the cottage, fruitlessly planning for themselves a future in which they should be wed. Carlo sat listening with one eye on Little Luck, who lay on the seat by their side, gazing up at the sky in a manner which seemed somewhat foolish, though she was listening very earnestly too as she suddenly proved.

"Oh, Jan darling," said Dura, "what a shame it is when the world holds both rich and poor that we were not two of the wealthy ones, so that we could be married! I wish we had some gold—only a very little would do. How happy it would make us! Oh, look, look, Jan! What is this? See what lies in my lap!"

With a great effort the puppet had tossed the bag of gold on to her mistress, and as she watched the girl's

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joy the regret she had when she remembered all she had given up passed away and she was content. In the excitement, too, Carlo drew near and rubbed his head against her wooden one, just to let her know he understood how she felt at not being thanked for her generosity. True, nobody knew she had done this thing, and yet Dura seemed to suspect, for late at night, when Jan had torn himself away from the delights of planning and arranging for their speedy wedding, the girl picked up the puppet and gave her a kiss.

"You darling," she cried. "So you brought me luck after all, just as the showman promised. You and Carlo shall live with us in the home Jan is going to buy, and we will often come over and spend long days with mother."

But after the wedding—such a pretty wedding as it was—this promise seemed quite forgotten, for when the newly-married pair started off poor Little Luck was left disconsolate with the dog beside her. Dura rode upon a pony Jan had bought; he could not bear, so tender was his love, for her to walk as far as their new home; but just after they set off they stopped, and Jan came running back.

"The puppet, dear," he cried to his mother-in-law. "Dura wants that silly old thing to come with her, and Carlo too, if you can spare him."

With a delighted bound the dog raced off and trotted after the pony; but as he went along he could

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not help wondering why either of them had been troubled about, for poor Little Luck was tucked into a pocket of the saddle, and they did not once pause to see if the dog wanted a rest. They were so engrossed with themselves, for they seemed to fancy nobody had ever been married before, that they never even looked back when the puppet, going over some hard stones, was jolted out. The top of her head was chipped and the paint on one cheek was badly scratched; but as she lay in the road she felt quite resigned, though she guessed nobody would find her.

“But I gave them luck—really good luck,” she told herself; “so I must not complain. But oh, how I wish I was still in the cottage with Dura’s dear mother! She loved me, and cried when I was carried off. She was my true friend. How lonely she will feel by herself in that cottage! Not even Carlo with her. I wonder if he is still running after the pony’s heels. How tired he will be!”

But soon the dog came crawling back, looking most exhausted and sad. His head was down and his tongue hanging out, and he could hardly drag one leg before the other. When he saw his old friend lying neglected by the wayside he was delighted, for he felt they would not be separated again.

“They rode so fast,” he explained, “and paid no heed to me. Not once did they turn their heads, nor give me a whistle. I could not keep up. A few years

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ago the pace would not have mattered ; but even they, when they are older, will find the road between the villages gets longer each time they tread it. But come, I am going to carry you back to our own home. Dura's mother will welcome us, in spite of the mud on my body and the chips in your paint."

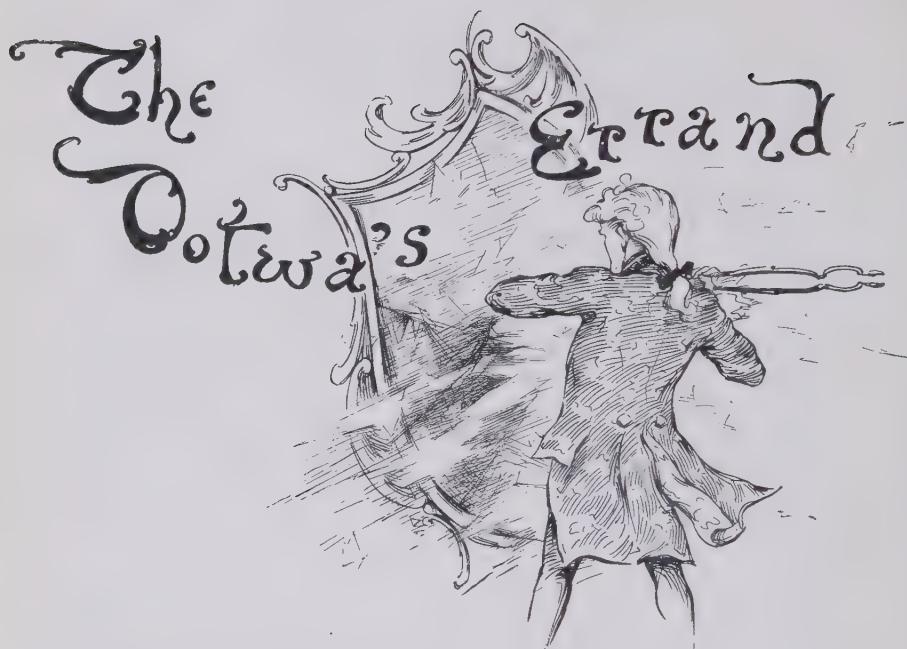
And indeed it was so.

When the lonely woman saw the dog had returned, carrying his companion with him, her happiness was great. Tenderly she bathed his feet and wiped the dust from Little Luck's face, and after Carlo had enjoyed a good supper, she sat outside her cottage door with the wooden puppet on her lap—alone, yet rich in her faithful friends.

But the fall must have shaken poor Little Luck, for she was quite cross as she looked at the stars with angry eyes.

"I'm glad I am not able to become mortal now," she said. "This Love people long for comes only to make them selfish, it seems to me."

"Oh, no, not real Love," sagely replied the dog, cuddling up to his mistress and pushing his nose under her hand in gratitude. "*That* teaches mortals to be tender towards all who are old or helpless. True Love never forgets."



THE Mirror almost burst into tears when he peered down and saw the handsome carpet strewn with fragments of looking-glass that had fallen from his frame. "It is too bad," he said indignantly. "It is through no fault of mine that his Royal Highness is losing his good looks, though I am sure he deserves to on account of the ugly frown he wears all day long. He stands here to admire himself when he is feeling very ill-tempered, and then he throws the fire-irons at me, because his reflection is not pleasant. I could cry when I think how greatly I am disfigured." And the

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Mirror sighed so deeply that some more pieces of glass were shaken upon the floor.

"There! there!" said the Sofa soothingly. "It is very sad, and I sympathise with you greatly. But yours is no uncommon case. We all get knocked about when the Prince is vexed. Think how frequently he kicks my nice cushions with his muddy boots, and cuts at me with his riding-whip. But be brave and do not give way. One person in tears is quite enough at a time."

"One! Why, is *She* crying again?" whispered the Mirror, regretting more than ever the loss of his glass, for now he could see nothing. The big yellow Sofa creaked sympathetically upon her castors as she answered, "Oh, yes; the Princess is in tears—she always is when she is not quarrelling. She is greatly to blame, I think, for she does her best to annoy her husband whenever she can; but I can't help feeling sorry for her, nevertheless. To be married to a man with a temper like the Prince Dana's would be enough to make me cry, I admit. And after all she is young and human—very human. Not stuffed with horsehair as I am, or with nothing as you are. Poor little Princess, listen to her sobs."

But as they spoke the Princess dried her eyes and drew near the broken looking-glass to inspect the damage her enraged husband had done.

"I am very sorry, dear Mirror," she said. "Though I suppose I am a little to blame for it, but when the

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Prince gets into one of his rages, I feel I must—I simply must—do my utmost to make him worse. I don't think he quite knew what he was doing just then, for I had irritated him so greatly. I have no sympathy with him when he gets like this, and I lost all my patience long ago."

The Sofa shook her pillow with joy. "Oh, if you had only run out of patience," she cried, "that does not matter. You can easily get some more."

The Princess knelt on the floor and laid her tear-stained cheek against the arm of the Sofa. "I am afraid I never had much," she acknowledged. "Tell me where to go, and I will buy a large quantity of it. I have plenty of money; the Prince is not mean, though he is bad-tempered and hasty. Is it far away?"

"No—o; but I don't think money will be any good," the Sofa told her. "Patience is not a thing you can buy. However, take my advice and go to the summit of the Thorn Mountain and see what will happen. The experience may do you good; at any rate it can do you no harm. I caught a glimpse of the mountain the day I was driven over here in a van. Why, let me see, it must be more than three years ago since the old King bought me."

"Yes," assented the Princess sorrowfully. "The Prince Dana's parents had the Palace newly furnished for us after our marriage. But oh, why did they trouble! I wish I had never, never come."

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"Nonsense!" cried both pieces of furniture sharply. "All you want is some more patience to make you very happy. Then you would be a different woman."

"But nobody has ever reached the summit of the Thorn Mountain," grumbled her Royal Highness. "At least, only very, very few. I am afraid to try alone."

"Pooh!" said the Sofa. "You make my horsehair lumpy when you talk such rubbish. You and the Prince cannot agree, and yet when I tell you a method by which you can avoid these scenes, you raise all sorts of foolish objections. You evidently like to pretend you are a martyr. Well, I don't mind, only you must not worry me again about your woes. And please, do not let your tears fall upon my best silk. I am not to be re-covered until the spring, so I do not want to get shabby yet. Besides, what would the Prince say?" she added mockingly.

The Princess rose to her feet and looked indignantly at the impudent couch. "I will go to the Thorn Mountain just to prove how wrong you are," she said. "And when I return I hope I shall find the Prince in a good temper, for I shall have one favour to ask of him. Only one, that is all."

"And what will that be?" demanded the Sofa a little uneasily.

"That you shall be relegated to the servants' hall," retorted her Royal Highness. "I have no use for you

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in this room as your airs make you quite unendurable. I suppose it is the fault of your inferior padding—that is the only way in which I can explain it.” And with this parting remark the Princess Entriken left the room.

“Ha ! ha ! ha !” sniggered the Mirror, for though he was really attached to the Sofa, it cheered him to hear the snub his smart yellow friend had just received. “That has done me good.”

“You had better not laugh too much,” said the Sofa coldly, “or you will shake down a few more fragments of glass, and if one of them so much as scratches me, there will be a nice fuss, I can tell you.” So after that the Mirror became discreetly silent.

In the meantime the Princess had wandered into the middle of the rose-garden, where she stood gazing thoughtfully at the distant Thorn Mountain, and wondering how she should ever be able to get there. She knew it was impossible to walk or drive up it, as the sides were quite perpendicular, and as she dared not take one of the horses from the royal stables upon such a fatiguing journey, what was she to do ?

“I shall give it up,” she declared aloud. “After all, I don’t think it would be very dignified if I went upon such a quest. It would be tantamount to acknowledging my faults ; nevertheless, it would be nice to stop disagreeing with Dana and to be once again as happy as we used to be. I ought to have been given more

The Ootwa's Errand

patience in the beginning. My supply was much too limited. Of course, I lost the little bit I had immediately—everybody would have done the same. It is too ridiculous!" But as Entrioken stood arguing with herself a little bird flew into her face, and as it disentangled itself from the Princess's curly hair it gave her its message:

"The roses hold the secret. Search them carefully."

The Princess ran to the nearest rose tree and roughly pulled open each flower in turn. Very soon the path became strewn with deep red petals, which looked like little pieces of soft velvet, dainty pink and cream leaves fluttered down next, while a few white ones went dancing over the lawn in a most disconsolate manner. But, oddly enough, directly her Royal Highness had finished destroying one blossom and passed on to the next, the poor damaged petals returned to their original stems and joined together again just as though nothing had happened to disturb them. So though the Princess laboured long beneath the scorching sun, when she paused to rest for a few minutes she could not tell the blossoms she had searched from those still awaiting her rough treatment. As she realised her work had been in vain, she also realised in what manner she had offended the flowers, for as you and I and all wise people know, if you treat a rose properly it will do anything you want.

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“Dear flowers,” said her Royal Highness penitently, “I humbly beg your pardon ; really I do. Although you dwell in my garden I understand now that I ought to have asked permission before I began to search you. It was a great liberty, and I apologise. But there is one among you who holds a secret that I am most anxious to share. Would each of you, please, just open your petals and allow me to peep inside ? You must not fear that I shall rub your bloom off. I know better now.”

One large pink rose raised its head and looked very seriously at Entriken before it spoke. It is rarely, indeed, that a rose becomes serious, but when it does, it is most impressive, and the Princess felt quite awed and wondered what she should hear. But the remark the flower made, though sufficient for all purposes, was somewhat brief.

“Open !” it said calmly. “Open !”

Slowly and majestically the beautiful rosebuds held up their dainty heads and expanded their petals, so that Entriken could peep in without any difficulty whatever. Hundreds of roses grew in the garden, but each one was in turn thoroughly inspected by the Princess, though her back ached and she felt very weary before she was half through her task. But at last she gave an exclamation of joy, and bending tenderly over a white rosebud she read the few words that were written on its little heart.



A LITTLE BIRD FLEW INTO HER FACE.

Kingdoms Curious

“Whistle for the Ootwa !”

“Oh,” cried the Princess furiously. “What a trick to play me! How dare you be so silly !”

But the rose had folded her petals carefully together and seemed quite indifferent to the outburst of royal indignation, so, trembling with annoyance, Entriken turned away only to find herself, however, face to face with the Prince Dana, who had completely recovered from his recent passion and looked most amiable as he saw his pretty wife approaching.

“Where have you been ?” he said kindly. “I think I saw you chattering to the flowers just now. What did you find to say to them, dearest ?” But the Princess was in no mood to be questioned, so she simply jerked her head in the direction from which she had just come, and walked on.

“There are the roses !” she said curtly. “If you are so curious, you had better go and ask them yourself. I shall tell you nothing. Let me pass, please. It bores me to listen to you.”

Now the Prince Dana, in spite of his bad temper, was very fond of his wife, and had really come into the garden to ask her forgiveness for breaking her mirror and to suggest that they should both try to be better friends in the future, but when he received this rude answer he forgot all his good resolutions, and seized her angrily by the wrist.

“You shall stay here as long as I wish,” he declared.

The Ootwa's Errand

"I will make you listen to me, whether you want to or not."

"Let me go," said the Princess, and although her husband was not hurting her at all, she pretended he was. "Let me go! I won't be held by you. Leave me alone or—or——"

"Or what?" he asked curiously.

"Or I will whistle for the Ootwa," and, before he could stop her, she had pursed up her mouth until it looked like a little red carnation, and whistled shrilly.

"Do you know what you have done?" said the Prince. "You must be mad. See, yonder it comes to claim you."

The Ootwa instantly responded to its summons, though where it came from nobody was able to say. It was very extraordinary to look upon, for it somewhat resembled a summer-house that had been made at home and then placed upon the back of a giraffe. From this creature's right ear proudly waved a Union Jack, which showed, at once, how well brought up it had been. "Go away!" screamed the terrified Prince. "You are ruining the lawn. Get off!"

But the Princess determined to prove how courageous she was; so she stepped forward, and, though shaking with fear, managed to get a seat upon the Ootwa's back.

"Take me up the Thorn Mountain," she whimpered, and then as the animal twisted its head round and she

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saw what a bland smile it bestowed upon her, she became quite brave and even managed to stare haughtily at her astonished husband. "Good-bye," she gasped through her chattering teeth. "I don't suppose I shall be home to lunch, so you had better not wait for me."

It took this mysterious animal a long while to get out of the palace grounds, and directly it was on the main road, Entriken offered a suggestion. "I don't think really that I need go so far as the Thorn Mountain," she said politely. "I have had a most enjoyable ride, but I won't trouble you to take me further. I only wanted to see what it felt like ; so, if you will please stop, I will get down."

But the Ootwa went steadily on just as though it had not heard one word. So her Royal Highness repeated her remark, this time rather loudly ; but there was no result, and at last she was obliged to realise the Ootwa was either very deaf or determined not to hear. So in grim silence they went on until they began to ascend the mountain, and then, to the Princess's intense surprise, this extraordinary beast proceeded to turn round and climb up backwards.

"Oh, don't do that!" screamed Entriken, quite forgetting the Ootwa's inability to hear when he was addressed. "I am afraid, and want to go home. If I must go up the Thorn Mountain, I must, I suppose, but do not let us creep there backwards. I feel as though I shall slip off in a minute. Turn round and

The Ootwa's Errand

run, dear Ootwa. That would be more satisfactory than slipping about like this."

The Ootwa looked steadily at his interfering little passenger, and then he shook his head until the flag waved violently to and fro. "I must go backwards," he said in a shrill treble voice ; "or else we shall never get there. For every step I take forward I slip two back. That is why I always walk away from any place I want to arrive at. It is a great nuisance having to go at all, and if you knew how to get on with the Prince I should have been spared this journey. I am the only animal who will go so far, and I don't like doing it, but your father-in-law used to be very good to me when he was a boy, so directly I heard how you two young people quarrelled, I felt I ought to help you to learn patience if I could."

"But how will this teach me patience?" questioned the Princess. "I thought it was a thing I could buy."

"Oh, dear no! But the more you practice it, the more you will have. You gained a little in the rose-garden this morning before you whistled for me. We might have got away sooner if you had not been in such a hurry to search the flowers that you began to do it without waiting for their permission. And now you are delaying us again by your grumbles. Sit still and do not make such a fuss. How inconsiderate you are!"

"Weshall never, never arrive there at this rate," wailed the Princess. "See how everything stops us. When

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we do get on a little bit, the thorns seem to block our path and hold us back. I can't be patient, and I won't be! Oh, yes, I will, though," she cried, for, to add to her other terrors, the Ootwa frowned. "But do ask the thorns not to prick me so much. I don't like it."

"I can't interfere," said her companion. "That is part of the lesson. It has all been arranged to make you think."

And indeed it was so. Every thorn that scratched the poor Princess recalled to her some little disagreement in the past, which had been brought about solely through her own impatience. When she pondered, she was obliged to realise, as others had done before her, how foolish it was to have so frequently lost her temper over these unimportant things. And as these recollections came crowding into her brain she felt most ashamed at the fuss she had made over many trifling matters. "I don't think I have been quite a perfect Princess after all," she said penitently. "I always thought the fault lay entirely with Prince Dana, but I see now how wrong I have been too. If ever I get safely home again, I shall be so different. But I need not think about it, I am sure. This method of travelling is so unsafe. Oh, what is happening now," she shrieked, as the Ootwa plunged wildly forward.

"Nothing," he told her. "I am simply hurrying, that's all. We shall advance much better now that you

The Ootwa's Errand

understand that you have not always been in the right. That is a great point gained."

For some time nothing disturbed the silence between them, for the Princess was too thoughtful to speak. As they moved along she found her impatient desire was giving way to the more reasonable conviction that the poor Ootwa was straining every nerve to get on, and that they would arrive at their destination as soon as they could. It was an act of kindness on his part to take her at all, she told herself, and she began to repent the hasty manner in which she had tried to urge him to greater speed. So clearly did she realise this that suddenly she stretched out a hand and softly patted its neck. "Poor old thing!" she said. "I won't complain again, for I know you are doing your best. Take your own time, and I will not grumble or worry you any more. It is very good of you to go at all, and as we are bound to reach the summit ultimately, I will just sit quietly here until we do."

"What did you say?" demanded the animal eagerly, and the Princess, marvelling, as she spoke, at the change that had come across her, obediently repeated her last remark.

"Hurrah!" cried the Ootwa, dancing round in a very clumsy fashion. "Hurrah! You have learnt your lesson thoroughly, so we may stop. Down you get, for we need go no further. On the summit of this mountain dwells the charming fairy we have come to

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seek. Look, she advances to greet you, for she knows all the difficulties we have encountered and rejoices, therefore, at our safe arrival. I will rest here until you are ready to descend, but don't hurry on my account. It is very quiet and peaceful, so I shall be quite content to wait."

"Welcome, dear Entriken," cried the fairy, running to meet her visitor with outstretched hands. "How glad I am to see that you have found your way to my dwelling-place; lately I have feared that you would never come. I have watched for you so long."

"It has been an arduous journey here," confessed her Royal Highness. "But all the pain of it has passed away now that I am in your presence. Oh, how beautiful you are!" she cried in rapture. "I would give all I possess to make such loveliness mine."

The fairy smiled and tenderly embraced the Princess. "You will be beautiful too," she assured her, "now that you have found me. Those who gaze long upon my face reflect upon their own its beauty. But after coming so far surely you are weary. Let me lead you within my home where you shall have whatever you desire. Come. Why do you hesitate?"

The Princess stood looking first at the Ootwa and then at her new friend in a most undecided way. "I cannot enter," she faltered. "I am not ungrateful, dear fairy, do not think that; but I want to go back now

The Ootwa's Errand

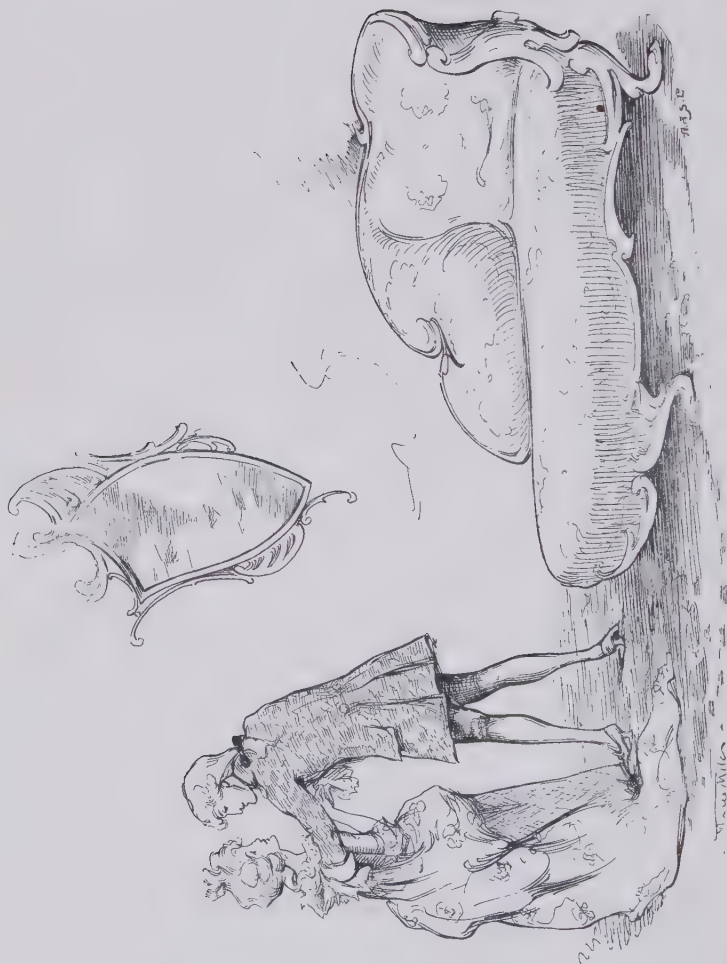
that I have found you. The Prince Dana awaits me and he will be lonely if I stay away."

"Nonsense!" growled the Ootwa. "Directly you meet, you will only quarrel, so why need you be so anxious to join him again."

"No," said Entriken firmly. "It takes two to make a quarrel. I have learnt my lesson and I mean to try my best to make a good and patient wife in the future. Poor Dana, I can see how greatly I have plagued him in the past, but it shall never happen again. Besides, there is another reason why I wish to go home," she added shyly. "The way to the summit of the Thorn Mountain is a long and wearisome one, and I am sure that many lose the right road altogether or give up the path in despair. That is why, therefore, as I want my husband to participate in these newly found delights, I feel I must lead him hither myself, so that in doing so I may, perhaps, be able to assist others. Dear fairy, good-bye. I cannot forget you again, for you will be in my heart always. Good-bye."

A few minutes later the Ootwa deposited the Princess at the door of the Palace, but before they separated, he twisted his long neck round and looked gravely at her. "Now, don't forget your lesson," he said gruffly. "Remember to practice patience daily, then you won't run out of it again."

"Thank you, dear Ootwa," replied Entriken. "I am sure Dana will willingly set out when he sees how



THE PRINCESS AND HER HUSBAND ARE RECONCILED.

The Ootwa's Errand

much the journey has improved me. Anyhow, he will be able to resist no longer when he hears the name of the fairy who welcomes all those who climb so far."

"Oh, you have found out her name, have you?" said the Ootwa, as he prepared to leave. "Tell me, then, what do you think she is called?"

"Her real name is Happiness," said Entriken softly, "though many call her Peace."

"Well," said the Mirror a little later on as he listened to the Princess giving her husband an account of her adventures. "I am glad I told her Royal Highness what to do. See how well my advice has turned out. These two will live happily together now, I am sure. To achieve such a result was indeed worth the sacrifice of my glass."

"Pooh!" said the yellow Sofa jealously. "It was entirely owing to me that the Princess and her husband are reconciled. I was the chief adviser all the time."

"We both did it," said the Mirror soothingly. "And as the result has been so successful, suppose we also follow their example and try to be better friends for the future. Let us make up our minds to agree. Nothing is gained by quarrelling, do you think it is?"

"No," said the Sofa. "I hardly like to admit such a thing, but I am sure, for once, you are right."

And I believe so too, don't you?



AS Matt trudged home one evening after a long day's work in the fields, he paused on his way to light his pipe, and while he did so a noise which he was unaccustomed to struck upon his ear and made him wonder. From the adjacent village came shouts and yells, the cracking of whips, and other sounds that suggested some poor animal was being hunted out of the place. That, indeed, was so, for Matt had not been in his dreary hut long before he saw an old white horse slowly limp towards him. The poor creature bore upon his thin body the marks of cruelty that he had received from the villagers, and he

The Lucky Horse

seemed too weary and worn to drag his lame feet many steps further. As he stood looking at Matt with his sad brown eyes, he seemed to say, "Oh, take me in, please ; I am starving and very tired" ; at least, that was what Matt thought as he went forward and patted his thin sides.

"Poor old fellow !" he said kindly, "I wonder where you have come from. But that does not much matter now, does it ? I can't keep you here, I'm afraid, for I am very poor and have not enough to eat as it is." But as the animal dropped his head a little lower Matt's heart became tender, and he changed his mind. "We'll be companions in misfortune," he announced. "You shall live with me and share half of everything I have. There is plenty of room for you in the hut, and I will go and fetch you some bracken for a bed."

So the old horse settled down most contentedly with his new master, and when they shared between them a dry crust of bread he was just as happy as when Matt brought him home a bunch of nice carrots or a juicy apple. At first it was very difficult to find money enough to pay for these things, but as time went on Matt noticed changes in his hut that he could not help marvelling at, though he was, nevertheless, very pleased. Every morning a little after daybreak he trudged away to his work, leaving the old horse sleepily blinking at the sunshine, or letting the warmth of its rays beat

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down upon its body, which, though certainly in better condition, left much to be desired ; but by evening, when Matt returned home, he was sure to find the little hut had been tidied up, sticks collected for the fire, and a savoury stew ready waiting for his supper.

“Do you know,” he said to the horse one evening after making these pleasant discoveries, “I really think you have brought me luck, for somebody looks after my home now, and I believe it must be you. I shall watch and find out.”

But though Matt did so, he was no wiser, for as long as he watched nothing happened. All day the old horse stood lazily gazing at him until his master, feeling somewhat foolish, gave it up and went back to his work, only to return to find his hut made as comfortable and neat as usual.

One day as Matt came in he saw lying on the floor a beautiful piece of white lace, so fine that it did not seem as if mortal hands had touched it ; but, nevertheless, they had, for there was a piece of paper pinned to it saying it was to be sold. Full of wonder, Matt hastened away to the village ; but on the road he met one of the king’s courtiers, who, hearing his errand, bought the lace at half its value, meaning to make it a present to the Queen. So prosperity began to shine upon the hut. From time to time mysterious lace appeared, which Matt easily disposed of at the Palace until his wonderful skill became spoken of from door

The Lucky Horse

to door. For the youth, unlike many, kept his own counsel, and did not speak of the strange things he knew, nor of the old white horse he had saved from starvation; and though he heartily disliked being praised for work he had not done, he felt it was better than blurting out the truth. But one day, to his consternation, as he approached his little home he saw a crowd of horsemen round the door, and from their glittering armour and waving plumes Matt thought they must be King's messengers, for he never believed it could be his Majesty himself, though as he drew nearer he saw this was so. In the centre of the group, seated upon a beautiful black charger, was the King, laughing contemptuously at Matt's old white horse, as it stood before the door of the hut as though guarding the way.

"Well, Matt," said the monarch genially, "I did not know you kept horses. You must be richer than you led me to believe."

Matt shook his head seriously and then patted his pet lovingly. "I have neither stable nor steed, sire," he replied. "This horse is my friend and daily companion, but he does not work for me—at least, not in the way you mean."

"Well, well," said the King; "he seems a skinny brute; but it's your affair, not mine. I have come up to visit you, for I want to buy more lace, so let me see what you have, for I can't wait long."

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"Lace !" Matt's face went red and white, and he nearly began to cry. "I have no lace, your Majesty," he faltered. "At least, none to show you. It—it is not ready yet."

"Show me what you have," commanded the monarch. "I want to make the Queen a present ; but look sharp. I can't wait all day here."

"There is none in the house," wailed Matt, feeling in a most uncomfortable position, and not knowing quite what to do or say.

"But surely you must have the designs or patterns you work with," urged the other. "Think carefully, and see what you can find. You seem half asleep."

But Matt was really very wide awake ; for he knew if he told the truth about the lace none would believe him, and he could not make up any falsehood with which to deceive the King, who was already gazing at him most suspiciously. As his eyes wandered restlessly about, as though seeking an excuse from the objects that surrounded him, Matt chanced to glance at the old horse, who, with pricked ears, stood looking at him, until, seeing he had caught his master's attention, he slowly nodded his head up and down. Matt stared in astonishment, until a sudden idea came to him. Could this mysterious white horse that had appeared so unexpectedly mean anything by what he was doing ? Up and down, up and down, went the old head, until Matt was resolved, and he felt determined to take the risk.

The Lucky Horse

"Your Majesty," he said, coming forward as he spoke, but, nevertheless, keeping one eye fixed on his odd four-footed friend, who seemed also to be listening, "your wish shall be obeyed. I have neither patterns nor designs to show you, but if you tell me what you require, and the date upon which it must be ready, I will endeavour to please you," he went on, and then he gave a little sigh as he saw that the horse, evidently content with the state of affairs, stopped nodding his head and appeared to listen no more.

So the King issued directions about the lace shawl he wanted made for her Majesty, and when he had finished he shook his whip, half seriously, at Matt, who was feeling very worried indeed, and would have liked to confess everything until a look at the horse recalled him to himself, and he knew it would be useless.

"Now mind, Matt," cried the monarch; "within three weeks the shawl must be ready, otherwise you shall finish your task between the prison walls. If it is complete when I arrive, you shall receive enough money in payment for it to buy everything you want, even a new tail for this old steed, who seems sadly in need of one." And with a contemptuous laugh at the poverty-stricken couple who lived in the hut, the King rode away.

When the last gleam of armour had been hidden by the wood, Matt sank down on a stone near the door

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and held his head in his perplexity as he rocked to and fro. "What shall we do, eh?" he said to his horse, who, unlike his master, seemed to bear everything very calmly. "Of course, you can't understand; but if I fail to make this shawl, or if it fails to appear as mysteriously as the other lace did, you and I will be parted, perhaps for ever. I may be thrown into prison and kept there for years and years, while you—oh, I don't know what will become of you; you are too old and worn out for anybody to buy, so I am afraid you will starve."

The next day, in spite of his worry, Matt had to leave his hut to work in the fields; but while he laboured beneath the hot sun, his heart was fixed on his home and what he should find when he returned. But when he was able to throw aside his tools and hurry back, there was no packet of lace lying upon the brick floor, not even the old horse to welcome him home.

Matt stared about him in bewilderment, but though he searched and called loudly for his companion, he was quite alone until after the sun had set, when suddenly the white horse pushed his way through the thicket and walked slowly towards his home.

"The King was right" said Matt critically. "This animal has an awful tail, and I verily believe the hair upon it grows less; but still, we shan't be together much longer, so what does it matter?"

Every day Matt looked to see if he could find the

The Lucky Horse

lace with which to satisfy his Majesty, but no trace of it could he discover until late one afternoon, too restless to continue his work, he threw down his spade and began to search the woods, though for what he hardly knew. But suddenly the sound of a woman singing drew him near a little clearing, until, as he stood peeping through the branches, he nearly gave a shout of surprise, for there, sitting in sunshine, was a beautiful fair maiden, busily making lace. By her side lay a handful of white threads which seemed very familiar to Matt, though he failed to guess what it was until the maiden suddenly raised her eyes and gave a sigh. "The White Horse!" cried Matt to himself. "The White Horse! I see it all now. My dear old companion and friend must be under a spell."

And soon Matt felt sure this was the case. The moment he left the hut the old horse threw off his worn and cumbersome shape and appeared as a beautiful maiden, who, the instant she had tidied up their little home, ran to the wood to sew at her lace. And there she sat, ignorant of Matt's curious eye peeping at her, until the sun began to set, and then the charm again bound her, and she was forced to take upon herself the horse's body, which day after day seemed to grow thinner and more frail, until, as the three weeks grew near their end, it seemed as if the animal had hardly strength to move its tired limbs to crawl back to the hut. The beautiful maiden, too,

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looked so pale and white as she daily bent over the lace, that Matt could barely restrain himself from rushing out and begging her to cease from work, for watching her so constantly had taught him to love her as much for her industry as her beauty, which was very great indeed.

The last morning arrived, and the shawl was still incomplete, and Matt's heart was full of regret as he saw the old horse stagger away from the hut and limp towards the wood, for he knew the task could not be finished and all their labour was in vain.

But soon he determined to speak with the maiden who toiled so bravely for his sake, but as he forced his way through the bushes he gave a cry of sorrow at the frightful sight that met his eye. On the ground before him lay the old white horse, gasping painfully. His thin wisp of a tail was stretched out limply, and so were his legs ; his eyes were closed, but he opened them feebly at the sound of Matt's distressed voice, and he tried to prick up his ears. In great trouble, Matt raised the poor white head and softly stroked the neck of his faithful companion, and as he did so his tears dropped hot and swiftly upon the white coat, until the sound of a trumpet made him start violently to his feet.

"The King !" he exclaimed. "Come to fetch his shawl ! I had forgotten everything but my sorrow."

But again a blast of the trumpet rang through the



SITTING IN THE SUNSHINE WAS A BEAUTIFUL FAIR MAIDEN BUSILY MAKING LACE.

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wood, this time followed by knocking on the hut door, until, very reluctant to leave his sick companion, Matt slowly turned away and walked towards the little crowd of people he saw assembling near his home. As he went forward, however, he heard the sound of swift footsteps coming along so lightly behind him that Matt, curious to see to whom they belonged, stopped and turned his head, and then to his amazement saw that it was the pretty lace-worker, who was trying to overtake him. Without a word she slipped her hand into his, and with the lace shawl on her arm drew near his Majesty, who, impressed by so much beauty, graciously bared his head.

"Here, sire, is the shawl you ordered," she said, pushing it up on to the saddle. "It is woven of the finest thread, and there is not a better one in the land."

But the King was so amazed at her loveliness that he forgot everything else.

"Who are you?" he said, "and from whence come?"

And the maiden looked up and honestly answered him.

"An old witch punished me for teasing my father's horses by turning me into one also. I was a poor, thin, half-starved creature, your Majesty, until Matt took me in and made me welcome. But his kindness gave me the power of daily throwing off the spell that

The Lucky Horse

held me, though when the sun set I became a horse again, and thus remained until his tears of pity, falling on my horse's skin, broke the charm and made me free."

"And now," said the monarch, as he gave her the bag of gold in exchange for the shawl—"And now what do you intend to do?"

And the girl blushed a rosy red as she looked up at the King and then back again at Matt, who was standing silent by her side.

"I think now," she said bashfully, giving her hand to the young man, who held it fast, "I should like to marry Matt, if he will have me, and if"—and here she dropped a sweeping curtsey to the King and gave a saucy little laugh—"if your Majesty will please command it."

But the King, looking into the happy faces of the lovers, saw that his command was not necessary, as Matt appeared more than ready to do the lady's bidding.

(A) Cat of Three Courts.



IT was quite in vain that Hileyaki urged Rinchow to be his bride, for though he knew she was fond of him she simply refused and shook her little head, until the wonderful erection on it seemed likely to fall. Daily he would sit on the matting by her side and try to advance his suit, but, after a time, she would slip her feet under the thongs of her sandals and trot off, either to enjoy some chatter with the bamboo weavers or the rice cleaners who inhabited the street in which she dwelt with her parents, or to visit the silk merchants and buy rich material with which to deck her dainty person. For there

The Cat of Three Colours

was no denying the fact that Rinchow was even vainer than most of her fair sisters in Japan, and spent many hours each day in adorning herself. Several lovers she had, but none whom she was willing to treat seriously, and, indeed, it was noticeable that after much friendliness with her they departed and never returned, though in time their ill fate was proved, for the lovers of Rinchow invariably met their death in the open water that flowed in to caress the edge of the bay near which she lived.

But at last came the time when Hileyaki was determined to have the question settled finally, for this uncertain state was wearing him out—indeed, his sleep at nights was disturbed, and very often he could not bring himself to eat the rice that his old mother so skilfully prepared for his meals.

So he went to Rinchow—pretty Rinchow, with her dainty form and beautiful black eyes, that were so full of brightness when the sun's rays made them sparkle that they appeared as jewels to her adoring lover, who was, however, so nerving himself to be determined, that, for the first occasion since his courtship began, he did not notice them.

But Rinchow laughed and dimpled her little face as he besought her to make her decision, though when he ceased narrating the list of his possessions, she laid her tiny hand, clasping her fan, upon his shoulder.

“Listen, O Hileyaki mine,” she replied softly. “So

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greatly do I love thee that I would fain keep thee by my side, and yet, when I left childhood's days behind me, I vowed by the moon's pale rays that no man should claim me his until, through his deeds, he had proved himself brave and kind at heart. I have heard of thy great deeds when thou art called upon to fight, therefore I think that thou wilt not falter at the test I give."

"I would do much to call thee mine," responded Hileyaki. "Indeed, I can think of nothing that should dismay me. Tell me what schemes fill thy little head, O Rinchow the Wise."

She laughed and clapped her hands merrily at the new title, and then the two squatted down on the mats that formed their seats, and a look of intentness came over their faces as their voices sank to soft whispers. But soon Hileyaki raised his head and stared straight before him with eyes that were blinded by the horror of what was to come. He gazed upon the red colours of the sunset and the flags which still waved in honour of some small festival; the paper lanterns that were dotted along the streets he had no sight for, nor the gay dragon-flies that skimmed by in the last rays of the day's sunshine. The beauties of the land he loved lay unheeded before him, for a new-born fear had come to him, which he could not free himself of.

"Seek out the witches in their cavern!" he muttered. "To sail over the water that I know covers up the Zenbei Demons, who with their long and sinewy arms

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draw all mariners down below the waves! Nay, I dare not do such deeds."

"Not to call me thine, Hileyaki?" said Rinchow softly, looking steadily out at him beneath her long lashes. "Hast thou lost the love thou spoke of already?"

"Why dost thou ask this of me?" he responded. "Thou knowest that I have a fair share of this world's goods; my temper is not more evil than that of my neighbours. I would make thee a good husband without this ordeal. Let us think of thy words as unspoken, dear one."

But she was firm.

"I would prove to my own satisfaction thy bravery and thy tender heart," she replied, "and this is the only way."

And then a great black thought arose in the quaking mind of Hileyaki, and made big drops burst out on his forehead, while the tips of his yellow fingers went cold, and it seemed as though beetles did pace up and down his back—so strange and ill at ease was he.

"Thy other lovers," he gasped, "whose bodies were washed up on the shores after many weeks—didst thou send them on this deadly quest too?"

Rinchow was carefully smoothing out a crease in her robes, and it was long ere she spoke.

"Yes," she assented casually. "Bravery they had, but no kindness of heart. So they failed."

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“How dost thou know this?” he demanded.

But Rinchow shrugged her shoulders and glanced at him out of the corners of her eyes.

“I have knowledge,” she said curtly; “that is enough.”

And Hileyaki, remembering she was possessed of magic power, watched her enter the house without attempting to stop her.

All that night he struggled with himself concerning the long journey his sweetheart had suggested to him, but the morning found him resolute and determined. He would not trust himself to see Rinchow again, so, after sending her a few loving words, accompanied by a bunch of cherry blossom, he set off towards the sea-shore. As he bent over his boat to stow in a dry corner the little store of food he had brought with him, a starved-looking cat approached, and before he could stop it the small creature jumped on to one of the seats, and sat looking anxiously into Hileyaki's face.

“Now where do you come from, I wonder?” said he, as he noticed his furry companion. “Well, anyhow, be off out of my boat; I don't want you here. Ssh!” The little animal obeyed, but, nevertheless, seemed reluctant to leave, and it was only when Hileyaki picked up some stones with which to pelt it that it really moved away, but in an instant there it was again, perched in the boat. It fixed its eyes so piteously upon the man's face that he had not the

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heart to drive it off a second time, so he softly patted the small head as a sign of peace.

So Hileyaki and his new friend—who was to prove a friend indeed—set off on their journey to the Witches' Cavern, but they sailed all day before they even got near to the water that contained the Zenbei Demons. All through the night the cat sat bolt upright, staring out into the darkness with eyes that saw everything; while early in the morning, when his companion began to unwrap the food he brought with him, this strange creature, though very hungry also, never even looked round.

Hileyaki was half famished, and after a hearty breakfast, though he remembered the cat who accompanied him, he shrugged his shoulders, and quickly wrapped up the remainder of the food.

"You would come with me," he muttered surlily. "I did not ask you, nor did I want you, so you must not expect to share with me all that I have."

The cat made no response beyond laying its ears rather flat to its head, for it was very hungry and disappointed to find what a hard heart the man had. But Hileyaki soon relented, and, calling the little creature to him, he let it feed out of his own hand, and then he patted its soft fur.

"Why, you are a cat of three colours!" he cried in some surprise, for the previous day it had looked very scraggy and poor. "And a very nice one, too. I am

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really quite glad you have come with me, though I am afraid we shall both be drowned, particularly as we are near the dangerous part of our journey. However, you may bring me luck."

Just ahead of them they could see the ugly flat bodies of the Zenbei Demons, waiting with their long thin arms outstretched to draw them down to their destruction, and directly they approached near enough, skinny hands, covered with dark bristling hair, grasped the boat and made little grabs at its occupants. The fingers of these awful creatures were adorned with rings made of seaweed and bones of dead fish, while their palms were worn quite hard and leathery, which proved they walked on their hands as easily as they did on their crooked hind legs, which now lay stretched on the surface of the water. Hileyaki was filled with terror when he saw these hideous things trying to clutch him, for well he knew that they would never let go if once they got a firm grip ; so he shut his eyes and flung himself down on the bottom of the boat. The little cat, whom he had so despised, was much braver, and kept rushing from one end of the boat to the other, and by using its claws forced the creatures to loosen their hold. But when they had all done so, suddenly their heads, attached to thick squat necks, appeared just above the gunwale, as though anxious to ascertain how they had been defeated. The sight of the cat of three colours, however, was evidently too

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much for them to endure, as with a shriek of rage they all dropped beneath the waves and were never seen again together, though frequently as they sailed along one of their ugly faces would bob up and stare until driven away.

“So the Zenbei Demons are afraid of you,” said Hileyaki with some wonder as he drew the cat near him and gently caressed it. “And yet you are such a tiny thing to fear.” But nevertheless, everything on the journey seemed to respect the little animal that travelled in Hileyaki’s boat, and by its quiet demeanour it gradually won his heart—so much so, indeed, that when they drew near the Witches’ Cavern he proposed to go ashore alone rather than allow the cat to run any risk. All he had to do was to find his way into the interior of the cave, and, when there, steal the large water-lily that floated in a pool, so nearly out of sight that when adventuresome travellers penetrated too quickly, it was only to meet their death by falling headlong into this deep and treacherous snare. But when Hileyaki left his boat and toiled up the beach, the little cat swiftly followed him, but so silently that it was never discovered until too late to go back. So the cat and its master went slowly forward, seeking for something that, had Rinchow been reasonable, would never have been required. The entrance to the cave was guarded by the most awful-looking witch, who ground her teeth and puffed fire from her lips

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directly she saw them ; but the cat was not afraid, so its master could not be either, and in a few seconds he was locked in deadly combat with the witch. To and fro they swayed, each so determined on conquest that every nerve and muscle quivered beneath the strain put upon it, until it seemed as if they would never be parted. And for the first time the little cat seemed too frightened to watch. She sat and cried with her paws held before her face until the witch was hurled to the ground ; then she jumped up and began to rub herself approvingly against her master's legs. But Hileyaki was too fatigued to pay much attention to her ; in fact, after giving her one pat, he began to press forward again, for he was anxious to secure the water-lily before the other witches arrived. On he groped in the darkness of the cave, feeling nothing but the rock above his head and on each side of him, until a shriek from the cat made him stop in alarm. It was only just in time, for there, at his feet, was the pool of black shining water, on the surface of which gleamed the white lily, looking like some beautiful star you see in the sky on a dark winter's night. A noise of hurrying footsteps startled him so much that he quickly pulled the flower out of the water, and then, with his cat at his heels, began to run towards the opening of the cave, meaning to get to his boat as soon as he could. Swiftly the witches pursued him, and as Hileyaki reached the beach he felt them

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gaining on him step by step. With a sigh of relief he flung himself into the boat, and had just pushed off when, to his horror, he remembered the cat—the faithful cat, who had gone through so much for his sake. But it was too late. The little animal had been captured by the witches, and Hileyaki could hear its cries of distress as it realised it was deserted and alone. He glanced over his shoulder at the beach, and as he did so the cat broke away from its enemies, and with a leap and bound flung itself into the water and began to swim towards the boat. Instantly Hileyaki put back to meet it, and before the witches plunged into the sea he was able to haul the shivering cat on board. As the sun shone upon it, it looked so frightened that Hileyaki gathered it lovingly into his arms and softly stroked it.

“O little cat of three colours,” he said, “thou hast brought me good luck. No wonder the Zenbei Demons were afraid of thee and the witches could not hold thee fast. If only Rinchow could see us, how she would rejoice!” And so saying, he bent down and softly kissed his good friend, but as he prepared to do so the second time he started back in alarm, and flung the cat to the other end of the boat, for it began to grow larger and larger after it had been caressed, until, as Hileyaki sat watching it, it slowly changed into Rinchow herself, who smiled and nodded to her lover as she played with her fan.

“Hast thou no kiss to spare for me?” she pleaded

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wistfully. "Am I less dear than a cat, even one of three colours? 'Tis but a moment ago thou didst fondle me, but because I assume my natural shape thou art silent, and wilt not say 'Welcome.'"

"O Rinchow beloved, why didst thou play this trick upon me? I little thought the poor starved cat I took with me was thyself."

"It was to test thy kindness of heart," she told him, "that I came to thee in such a plight. When thy heart softened towards me, and thou didst allow me to sit in thy boat and partake of thy food, I knew that thou wast the man, above all others, whom I could wed. I followed thee to the Witches' Cavern to protect thee from harm, for I knew safety lay in having a cat of three colours by thy side. It bears a lucky charm at sea and on shore, they say, and thou hast proved it."

But Hileyaki shook his head and slipped his arm round the waist of Rinchow before he spoke.

"Not on shore," he said lovingly, "for there is one piece of good fortune I still desire."

She glanced at him out of the corners of her eyes, and then looked down and blushed.

"What is that?" she demanded. "Hast thou not all thou requirest?"

"No," he assured her. "Promise to be my wife, and I will want for nothing, for then I shall be content."

And Rinchow, anxious to satisfy her lover, drew his head down so she could whisper in his ear.



ONCE upon a time, in a distant country, there lived a beautiful young Queen whose name was Amarinthe. Her parents died when she was quite a child, so all matters connected with the State were managed by her uncle, who was therefore the Prince Regent. As he did not consider his niece capable of governing the country unaided, he decided the wisest thing would be to marry her to the Duke of Chryso-phase, a rich nobleman, who owned a fine castle and a great deal of land adjacent to the royal estate.

Soon the auspicious day arrived, and the members of the Court were summoned into the council chamber to witness the first meeting between the young Queen and the Duke; the

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rule of the country being that the pair should not speak to each other until they had been publicly betrothed.

Queen Amarinthe was seated upon the throne at her uncle's side, while near her stood the ladies-in-waiting, the Lord Chamberlain, and his son Verna. The latter person, however, appeared to take no interest in the proceedings ; indeed, he felt so unhappy that he thought he would break down and weep. Although this was an occasion of great rejoicing within the Palace, it was nevertheless a very sad day for him. He had faithfully loved the beautiful Queen for many years, and hoped some day to win her, but now that the Duke of Chrysophase had become his rival he realised his love was wasted. The previous night, too, he had had a most remarkable dream, which he could not understand ; but, though the recollection of it worried him, he did not care to ask for its interpretation, as he knew he would be laughed at by his companions.

As soon as all were assembled, the Prince Regent rose to his feet and addressed the people in the following words :

“Most honoured and beloved subjects, the time has arrived when it is imperative that her Majesty, the Queen Amarinthe, should wed one who will be able, by his loving help and counsel, to assist her in ruling this kingdom. The reins of government and power are to be placed in her hands directly, so that in a short while, therefore, she will have absolute command over the

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country. After giving the matter my most careful consideration, I can find no one who is more suited by rank, riches, and nobility of character to be the husband of our Queen than the Duke of Chrysophase. According to the custom of our land, the Duke has not yet met his bride-elect, but he is waiting now in an antechamber. Have I your permission," he went on, turning to Amarinthe, "to send the Lord Chamberlain to escort him into your presence?"

The young Queen gracefully inclined her head in response to this request; then she turned her eyes to the door and, like all her subjects, anxiously watched for the first appearance of her future companion.

The Lord Chamberlain quickly returned, walking backwards; and following him, with slow but stately steps, came the Duke of Chrysophase. He was a very handsome man, and looked to be most sumptuously attired in rich brocades gorgeously trimmed with priceless jewels and rare furs. When he raised his eyes to the Queen's face a thrill ran through her, for she knew she had never seen anybody quite so beautiful before.

"Welcome, my lord. Thrice welcome to the Palace!" exclaimed the Prince Regent, as the visitor reached the throne. "I am bidden by her Majesty to inform you that, upon the advice of those interested in her welfare, she is willing to accept you as her husband. I have much pleasure, therefore, in now presenting you to her."

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The Duke knelt before the throne, and, taking the Queen's hand in his, he was about to imprint a kiss upon it, when he gave a violent start and jumped to his feet with a look of horror upon his face.

"I crave your pardon," he exclaimed, turning to the Prince Regent in a most agitated manner. "I can not marry your niece. The union between Queen Amarinthe and myself can never take place; everything must be at an end between us. The whole thing is an impossibility."

White with passion, and almost too startled to move, the Queen rose and confronted the determined Duke.

"Speak, my lord! I command you to tell me what I am to understand by the words you have just uttered. I insist upon a full explanation immediately."

At this stage of the proceedings the young man Verna raised his head and began to listen attentively, but nobody paid any heed to him. They were all too interested in following the strange development of their Sovereign's love affair.

"Since your Majesty demands an explanation, I will give it," said the Duke graciously, "though surely you can guess the true reason yourself. I could never wed a lady with hands like yours! They would be terrible for any woman to possess, but they are a disgrace for a Queen!"

"My hands!" echoed her Majesty in great surprise. "Why, what fault can you find with them?"

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“Look at their condition,” replied the Duke, in a tone of disgust. “See how the nails are bitten closely down to the quick. If I married you, think of the harm such an example would do to everybody in my castle! No, it can never be. Farewell, your Majesty. Farewell!”

As the Duke strode out of the room the Queen gazed furiously around until her gaze rested upon the young fellow who stood near her. “Verna,” she cried in a most agitated manner, “come here; I wish to speak with you. You have been present and heard the insults offered by the Duke of Chrysophase, who refuses to marry me on account of my hands. Why did you not come forward to defend me, my most gallant knight?”

But Verna stood silent before the enraged lady.

“Surely you do not wish me to understand that you agree with the Duke?” she went on. “Tell me immediately what you think of my hands.”

So Verna looked up and spoke the truth bravely, although he knew it would put him out of favour with the Queen, who would never find it in her heart to forgive his candour.

“Your Majesty,” he faltered, “since you ask my opinion, I must give you a decided answer. In all my life I have never seen such ill-kept hands. Not even upon a hard-worked drudge or a beggar-maid!”

“It is infamous!” shrieked Amarinthe, stamping

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her foot with temper. "You only say this to annoy me. Ill-kept or not, you shall feel, sir, that they are strong."

And the indignant Queen struck Verna twice upon his cheek.

"Confess they are faultless," she demanded, "or I will have you severely punished. Look," she cried, stretching out one hand before him, "isn't that perfect in every way?"

Smarting from the blow, and humiliated at the insult, Verna determined to be honest.

"No!" he cried loudly. "It is very, very far from attaining perfection." Then, remembering his dream, he added: "The world only contains one perfect hand, but this I will find, if only to prove you to be wrong."

"Very well," retorted the Queen. "In this manner shall you be punished for your rudeness. I will send you forth accompanied by soldiers to whom I will give orders to kill you at the end of twenty days unless you have discovered this wonderful thing. So I will say farewell, *friend* Verna," she added mockingly; "I wish you a pleasant journey, though I know you will never come back alive. It is a hopeless search!"

"Stay!" said Verna. "If I fail, I understand death is to be my punishment; but what is to be my prize, should I be successful?"

So certain did the Queen feel of his failure that she told him he might name his own reward.

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“Then,” cried the bold Verna, “I demand you for my wife, should I return. In spite of all, you are very dear to me, and I have long loved you. If I succeed in my quest of the perfect hand, I shall claim you for my bride.”

Queen Amarinthe gazed earnestly into the face of her strange lover.

“I give you my word of honour,” she said firmly, “that this shall be as you wish. I have always had a kindly feeling in my heart towards you ; and if you return I shall be proud to be yours.”

So the next day Verna rode away from the Palace closely surrounded by a guard of soldiers, while her Majesty stood biting her nails upon the balcony and thoughtfully watching his departure. As she saw him cross the drawbridge the tears sprang to her eyes, and she felt very sad, for she could not help wondering if they would ever meet again.

For many days the young fellow wandered aimlessly about, passing along highways and through many strange cities. He anxiously inspected the hands of everybody he saw—indeed, in many instances he begged people to remove their gloves, so eager was he to find this hand ; but all his efforts proved fruitless. On the evening of the eighteenth day the little cavalcade came in sight of an old castle, where Verna determined to entreat hospitality for the night, as he had lost his way and was a long distance from a town.

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The owner of the castle appeared at the door to bid him welcome. "Though I fear," said the old man, "you will find but poor company within these walls. To-day is one of mourning here. Nevertheless, in spite of our sorrow, we are always willing to receive travellers, and will do our best to make you and your men comfortable."

When Verna finished the most excellent supper that had been provided, he ventured to ask his host the cause of the sad expression he observed upon his face, and why everybody connected with the castle looked so depressed.

"Listen," was the reply, "and you shall hear about our grief. My only daughter, who I am sure you will admit, when you see her, is very beautiful, used to be wonderfully gifted with her needle. In many homes around you will find traces of her beautiful embroideries. In colour and design her work could not be surpassed, while her graceful hands made it a pleasure for us to watch her stitching. One hot summer day, two years ago, the dear child felt so weary that she took her book into a cornfield to read ; but the heat of the sun made her fall asleep where she lay, entirely hidden by the corn. The reapers were hard at work, and ignorant of her presence among them, until one, by a stroke of his sickle, struck my darling's right hand from her wrist. My wife, who was even more upset than the poor girl, refused to allow this severed member



INTERRUPTED BY THE ENTRANCE OF A VERY LOVELY MAIDEN

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to be destroyed or buried, but succeeded through some wonderful concoction of herbs in preserving it in its natural beauty. It is regarded now as one of our most valued possessions, and if you care to see it you shall do so. We always mark the sad anniversary of the catastrophe by lamenting anew over the terrible accident that occurred, and you have unfortunately arrived upon one of these occasions. However, the day is nearly over ; and to-morrow, if you will remain, you will find us quite gay. Now, therefore, if you will spare me, I will go in search of my daughter, and tell her to bring the casket to you."

Whilst Verna awaited her appearance he could not help wondering if the search was ended, and if he was at last going to discover the perfect hand. His thoughts were quickly interrupted by the entrance of a very lovely maiden, who carried a handsomely embroidered cushion, upon which rested a quaint crystal casket. Her maimed arm was concealed by draperies of an exquisite colour, while her curly hair fell in profusion over her shoulders.

"Sir," she said, approaching him, "my father tells me you desire to see this casket that contains my hand ; therefore I have brought it to you."

For a few minutes Verna gazed in silence at the perfectly modelled hand that lay passively upon its bed of strange herbs. As he looked he noticed the dazzling whiteness of the skin and the beautiful oval shape of the

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nails, while the pink and white of their colouring was so dainty that they resembled five little blush rosebuds far more than the fingers of an ordinary mortal.

"It *is* the perfect hand!" he exclaimed in a rapture of delight. "My quest has not been in vain, and I shall live. I have found the object for which I sought."

"Of what do you speak?" inquired the maiden's father, who upon entering the room quietly was somewhat astonished at hearing Verna's last remark.

"Ah, my lord," said Verna, "if you will allow your daughter to further extend her kindness to me, it will be within your power to make me happier than all men. With your permission I will now explain my meaning clearly."

Quickly he told them about Queen Amarinthe, the scene at Court, and finally how she had challenged him to produce the perfect hand, and the cruel penalty he was to pay if he failed.

"But I understand now," he went on, addressing the daughter, as she stood by her father's side, intently listening to his narrative, "why my work has been futile. How could I find the beautiful thing when it was in your possession all the while? I will not ask you to give me this precious token of your youth; but let me entreat you to lend it to me, just to show her Majesty. Your most trusted servant shall be its guard to the Palace, and when I restore it to you he shall be accompanied by a company of my own soldiers."

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The young girl smiled sweetly as she held the casket towards Verna, who received it gladly.

"May it bring you every joy!" she said. "Our old servant Karl shall be its guard; but I entreat you to return it to me soon, for I shall feel anxious while it is out of my sight. Although I know little about you, rumours of your father's integrity reach these parts daily, and I feel sure that his son can be nothing but honourable and brave too."

A day or two after this conversation took place Queen Amarinthe was pacing the hall of her Palace and biting her nails with anxiety, when a young page rushed up to announce that Verna had just ridden in.

"Send him to me," commanded her Majesty, still nervously fidgeting with her fingers. "Ah, me! how glad I am," she added to herself, "that he is safe!"

At this moment Verna entered, and as he knelt before the Queen he held out the casket for her inspection.

"See, your Majesty!" he said triumphantly, "I have found the perfect hand."

The Queen gazed earnestly at the wonderful trophy.

"How beautiful it is!" she murmured. "Oh! the difference between my hand and this one!"

"May I claim my reward now?" asked Verna, still kneeling humbly at her feet.

At her lover's speech Amarinthe blushed a rosy red.

"If you still care for me, in spite of the way I have

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insulted you. If you can forgive the long and arduous search I caused you to undertake," she said, "I am ready."

A few weeks later they were married with much ceremony and grandeur ; and directly they were alone the Queen held out her hands to Verna, and asked him to look at them.

"I have ceased to bite my nails," she explained shyly to him. "Let me hear your honest opinion of them now."

"They are very, very beautiful !" said Verna, as he stooped to kiss them lovingly. "Indeed, they rival the one I saw when first I realised I was successful in my quest of the perfect hand."

THE WISHING STONE

TWO fairies were walking home one evening, both feeling so tired and footsore that had they been mortals there would have been no difficulty in describing them as “cross,” but because they were fairies such a word could not be applied. So the pair of them trudged along in silence until they came to a little cottage built upon the side of the road, and there one stopped, declaring she could walk no further.

“But you must,” said the other; “we are obliged to reach the Palace to-night or the Queen will be vexed about it. Come along. It is not far now. You can’t stay here, you know.”

The Wishing Stone

"Yes, I can," retorted the first speaker; "I shall beg a bed from the people of the cottage, also some supper. I can always repay their generosity with a fairy gift."

"Not in this case," her companion told her, "for the cottage is empty. It is being built by Caleb, one of the royal shepherds, so as to be ready for his marriage day."

"Who is his bride?" said the other, quickly forgetting her fatigue in the interest of such news. "I did not know he cared for anybody."

"Indeed he does. He desired to have Bess, the head scullery-maid from the Palace, for his wife. But he has not yet the courage to ask her."

"What fun!" cried the first fairy, as she slipped through the door of the cottage, although it was locked and barred. "How pretty his little home is! It makes me wish I could live in it too. Well, good luck to Caleb and his bride, say I. I shall give them my wedding present now," and before she could be stopped she bent down, and, near the door, wedged between two of the bricks of the floor a little round pebble. "The use of this will surprise them, or my name is not Lightwing."

"Oh, what have you done?" said her companion. "Why must you always play tricks just because you happen to be a fairy? What is the good of a thing like that?"

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"It is the newest charm from Fairyland," Lightwing told her. "Anybody who places their foot upon it, and at the same time utters a wish, is bound to have it granted. See ; I will prove to you that what I say is the truth. We are invisible, so it will not matter," and the fairy tripped forward, and then set her two feet close together on the magic stone. "I wish for Caleb to come here immediately, and I wish for Bess to join him too," she cried. Then she gave a little sigh. "Now let us sit and rest on this mantelpiece," she added, "until they arrive."

In a few minutes the door was unlocked and Caleb appeared. He looked very white and anxious, for he could not understand why a desire to return to his cottage had suddenly seized him. He had been working in it until darkness came, then he threw down his tools and went home to bed ; but he had been unable to rest, for a feeling he could not account for had forced him to come back. Of course, he did not see the watching fairies, who were invisible, but he gazed round with a most puzzled expression upon his face until the door opened, and Bess, the scullery-maid, walked in.

"Why, Bess," cried Caleb, looking most delighted to see her, "what brings you here?"

"I don't know," she answered simply. "There was a banquet at the Palace, and I was busily washing up the dishes—Oh, such heaps and heaps of them!—

The Wishing Stone

when I felt suddenly I could not stay. I knew I must come here at once. It was just as though I had been called."

"Now," whispered Lightwing to the other fairy, "do you believe in the power of the Wishing Stone, or not?"

But her companion was too busy listening to be able to reply.

"Do not trouble yourself, my dear," said Caleb, "to find out why you came here. I am delighted to welcome you in what, I hope, some day is to be our home."

"*Our* home?" echoed Bess, with a pretty blush. "*Our* home?"

"Yes, for I want you to dwell in it too, as my wife. Bess, dear, will you say 'Yes'? I have built this little cottage simply for us to live in together. Will you marry me?"

"I don't think we need wait any longer with these lovers," remarked Lightwing, as she shook out her pretty wings before she started to fly away. "But now you are bound to believe in the Wishing Stone, aren't you?"

And the other fairy confessed she was.

One afternoon, when Caleb and Bess had been married some little time, a dense mist rolled down from the mountains and hid the village from sight, frightening poor Bess so much that she kept listening

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at the door, hoping to hear her husband's footsteps outside, for though he was not due home for hours she could not help being very anxious about his safety. "I wish I could see him now," she cried aloud, and although she had made the same remark frequently before, nothing had happened; but this time it was different, for one foot was resting on the Wishing Stone, which was so ordinary to look upon that even in cleaning the floor she had never observed it.

In less than five minutes she saw her husband's figure looming towards her out of the mist, and, with a cry of joy, she ran to meet him. But he was surly and indignant when he entered, for he could not account for the feeling which had drawn him to leave his duty and hurry home.

"I can't make it out," he said; "I knew I ought to stop, and yet I could not. I am home long before my proper time, and I have left all my sheep in peril. What can be the cause of it?" Then he looked at his wife sharply. "Bess," he said, "did you call me?"

"No, Caleb—that is—yes. Oh, I don't know! I suppose I did. I was standing over here, near the door, and I just wished to see you, and then you came."

"Then through your folly I may lose the King's sheep, the dear little woolly sheep who trust me to take care of them. What shall I do? I am ruined!"

Bess was so angry at this fuss being made about the



THE SHEEP CAME TROTTING INTO THE COTTAGE.

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flock that she lifted up her foot and stamped with temper, and this would not have mattered had not her foot unfortunately rested upon the Wishing Stone.

"Oh, I am sick of hearing of your silly sheep," she cried. "You value them far more than you do your wife. I wish they were all here now, sitting on your lap! Oh! No—no! I did not mean it! Go away! Go away!"

But it was too late. With contented bleats the sheep came trotting into the cottage, and tried to climb upon the lap of the astonished shepherd. They crowded into the room, bringing any amount of mud with them, but Bess was too surprised to prevent them. She forgot to shut the door, so when the room was full they commenced to clamber up the stairs, and some even went to sleep on the bed!

"If this is your joke, woman," shouted the infuriated shepherd, "'tis indeed a foolish one, and, believe me, it is not one I shall easily forget."

"A poor sort of joke," Bess thought to herself when Caleb had cleared the sheep away, "considering I have to clean the house now. I never saw more mud anywhere out of the road. And Caleb is angry with me—that is the worst of all."

Bess had plenty of time for thought, for Caleb would not speak to her, so she pondered over the subject until she became positive she was one of the few lucky people in the world who were always to have their

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wishes granted them. "If that is so," she said, as she cooked the supper, "I will wish for Caleb to forgive me."

But Caleb came home as cross as ever, for the wish Bess had uttered was quite useless, as she was not near the Wishing Stone when she spoke. So sure was she of this power of hers that as she went about the house all day doing her work, she used to wish for Caleb's forgiveness; but her words were wasted, until one morning, when the shepherd set off to his sheep flock in his usual gloomy manner, his poor penitent wife crept to the door to watch him.

"Oh, how I wish, how I wish," she said earnestly, "that Caleb would forgive me and let us be friends," and this time luckily her feet were upon the Wishing Stone. To her joy she saw her husband stop, then turn round and walk towards the house. When he noticed her in the doorway he held out his arms, and she, with a little sob, ran forward to meet him.

"Oh, Caleb, I am sorry—indeed I am," she said as they exchanged a kiss of reconciliation, and they both returned to their work with hearts far lighter than usual.

In time children were born to the shepherd and his wife, and when they were old enough to talk and to run about Bess had her hands full. The children naturally spent the greater part of the day playing round the doorstep or just within the door, for Bess

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would not allow them to remain far away, lest she should not be able to correct them when in mischief. Childlike, they were always longing for things they could not have, but this would not have mattered had not their longing sometimes taken the form of wishes, which, when uttered, as they often were, with their feet on the Wishing Stone, had a nasty habit of coming true, and causing great inconvenience. But in spite of these drawbacks, they were dear children, and greatly beloved by their parents. It was Caleb's pleasure to hurry back from his work directly after tea and watch his small family at play ; often his wife would join him, and together they would admire the antics of the little ones, and think how blessed they were to possess such offspring.

One evening Bess was sitting just within the open door with her knitting, when her husband came and stood by her.

"Oh, wife," said he, little thinking what would happen, "how light-hearted our children seem to be ! I am sure that that is the happiest period of life. How I wish that you and I were that size again !"

To their horror they began to shrink, and nothing could stop them, until Caleb was no taller than his eldest son, who was six, and Bess about the same height as their daughter of nine.

Too terrified to do anything, they stared at each other and wondered what would happen next. There

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was Bess, with her little body almost smothered in the grown-up frock she was wearing, and her husband, afraid to move lest he should tumble over his long clothes.

“Come with me,” whispered Bess at last, and together they crept out of the room and began to flounder upstairs to the cupboard, in which all the spare clothes were kept.

Luckily the little ones were too engrossed in their games to miss their father and mother, but when they turned round and found, as they thought, a couple of unknown children, they were very pleased.

“Come and play too,” they screamed, dancing round their shrunken parents without recognising them.

But the strangers shook their heads, for though they had small bodies they felt as old as ever—far older, really, with the shame of their position.

And then Bess, drawing herself up in a vain attempt to appear taller, ordered her family to bed.

With one accord they refused to go. “If it’s bedtime, why aren’t you in bed, you ugly little boy?” said the girl to her uncomfortable father. “Besides, who are you to order us about?”

So the children sat up very late, much to the horror of the parents, who could do nothing to prevent it; even when the little boy fetched a big pot of jam and passed it round for them all to enjoy, poor Bess could only cry.

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At last, however, the children were so tired that they were glad to be helped to bed, and when they had gone to sleep Caleb and Bess stole downstairs again, feeling that they would be able to discuss everything quietly together.

"I can't think why you wanted to talk such nonsense at all," said Bess.

"But I had no idea it would come true," he assured her, "and even now I can't think why it did. Besides, you need not grumble at me for this. You wished for the sheep to come into the house, don't you remember?"

"So I did," she answered, becoming wildly excited, "and I was standing somewhere near the door when I did it, just as you were this evening. There must be a charmed spot about there. Now let us keep on wishing to be changed back to our grown-up size as we walk about. We are bound to find the magic place then. I shall never, never sleep to-night like this. It is too dreadful!"

"We wish to be tall again. We wish to be tall again!" they both chanted as they proceeded carefully to walk over every inch of the floor, with such good results that soon they became themselves, and the dreadful experience they had passed through was only like a dream.

Before they went to sleep, Caleb gave his wife a little shake. "Are you awake? Can you hear me?" he

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said, and when she replied she could, he told her of a new plan that had just entered his head. "In the morning," said he, "I shall go and stand on that stone and wish for gold—sacks and sacks of gold. So that I shall be the richest man in the land, and able to leave off work and eat and drink as much as I like. Hurrah ! No more work for me."

Bess lay awake for hours, and thought about her husband's idea ; and the more she did so the more she realised that such a thing would be his ruin. She knew they were not fashioned to be wealthy ; they had not had enough education, and were ignorant of the manners of gentlefolk : besides, she hated any favour coming from the Wishing Stone. Well she remembered it had caused their first serious quarrel, and the shock she had had when she found herself dwindling was not one she was likely to forget.

When the snores of her husband told her he was fast asleep, Bess slipped quietly out of bed and ran downstairs. As the moon shone in at the cottage window she gazed up at it, almost hoping its bright light would help her, for she hardly knew how to frame the words she wanted to speak.

With her feet firmly planted on the Wishing Stone, she stood, and then drew a deep breath.

"I wish," she cried, "for the power that lies within this stone to leave it now and never to return, so that as long as it rests upon our floor it will be unable to again

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make trouble between us." As she went upstairs she gave a sigh of relief.

"If I had one wish left," she said as she tumbled into bed, "it would be to sleep well to-night. But I am so tired I don't believe I could keep awake if I wanted to. I shall not tell Caleb what I have done. I shall leave him to find out. I wonder how long he will be?"

THE END

